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CHAPTER 10

BLACK ARABIC

SOME NOTES ON AFRICAN
AMERICAN MUSLIMS AND THE
ARABIC LANGUAGE

SU'AD ABDUL KHABEER

DESPITE THE DECEMBER COLD OUTSIDE, IT WAS TOASTY INSIDE THE QUEENS apartment. This was thanks to what some New Yorkers jokingly nickname "project heat" that blasts from the apartment radiator whose thermostat a renter cannot control. A group of about seven African American Muslim women had come together for an *iftar*, a meal to break the daily Ramadan fast. After dinner, they gathered in conversation on topics ranging from the criminal justice system to an upcoming fashion show. At one point Saleemah, a middle-aged woman, was asked to share her *shahadah* story, the account of how she converted to Islam. Although she converted in 1975, she traced the origin of her journey to Islam to the late 1960s and her activism within the Black Panther Party and Pan-African movements. She told the group:

Allah had me go up one day to a prison, I was looking for my girlfriend's uncle who was um, unjustly, um, sentenced and I wanted to speak to him but his block didn't come out, but this [other] block came with all these brothers with white kufis, and I always had an eye for nice looking men so I said [to myself]: "well, who are all these nice looking brothers with these white kufis on their heads?!" I knew they were Sunni Muslims, people tried to give me dawah in '72 but I wasn't ready to hear it 'cause I felt the Arabs put black people in slavery, so I didn't want to hear nothing about Arabs.

Saleemah's story ends with conversion, yet her initial aversion to Islam because of Arab participation in the enslavement of Africans is notable. It is illustrative of the complexity and contestation around the meaning and role of the Arabic

language for African American Muslims. Arabic is the language of the Qur'an and daily prayers, and the Prophet Muhammad was an Arab—are these merely coincidences of history or do they carry a deeper significance?

African American Muslims, both converts and those raised in Muslim families, join the majority of the world's Muslims (most of whom are non-Arabs) who habitually use the Arabic language. The prevalence of Arabic use among non-Arab Muslims can be attributed in part to the religiously required use of Arabic in prayer. The language of the Qur'an and the early Muslim community, Arabic has also historically been the lingua franca of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Some Muslims argue that the relationship between Arabic and the Islamic community is merely coincidental: Arabic was the language of Muhammad and his community, which necessitated an Arabic Qur'an. However, for many Muslims, both scholars and laity, Arabic assumes preeminence over other languages. Arabic is not merely a language used by God to communicate to the world; rather, it is God's language and carries all the divinity and authority of its speaker.

In African American Muslim communities, Arabic enters everyday language through the practice of ritual. Arabic appears in the speech of African American Muslims when talking about religion, in greetings and other customary expressions, and in the use of words borrowed from the Arabic language that replace English equivalents, such as *umi* for mother, *bayt* for house, and so on. Importantly, these borrowed or loan words are of specific types: terms of endearment, titles to address family and community members, specific places, clothing, things and events, civilities, and theoretical concepts.¹ The introduction of the Arabic language in speech is also a conversational tool used to produce specific reactions in a discussion and direct the course of conversation.² Therefore, any analysis of the use of the Arabic language among African American Muslims must be understood in the context of who is speaking, to whom is she or he speaking, and what is he or she speaking about.

Most interesting about the use of Arabic in African American Muslim speech is that word choice and how often words are used index competing beliefs and attitudes toward the use of the Arabic language among African American Muslims. These beliefs and attitudes, also known as language ideologies, further index beliefs about what it means to be an "authentic" African American Muslim. In this debate, African American Muslims confront questions of identity. How does a community construct an identity that is distinctive yet not artificially so? What determines that choices are sincerely attuned to the African American Muslim's cultural, religious, and racial here and now? And why is that important? In this chapter, I examine Arabic language use and the role of competing language ideologies in authenticity debates among African American Muslim communities in the United States.³

I argue that the religious significance of the Arabic language functions beyond ritual religious practices. The religious origin of Arabic, for African American Muslims, imbues the language with a power that travels with Arabic as it is used in everyday speech. Therefore, even outside religious events, the Arabic language

is given a semiholy character and value among groups of African American Muslims. I will show how the authority imbued in Arabic allows for more than the simple substitution of Arabic words for English equivalents but the effective *replacement* of certain English words and phrases in the speech of African American Muslims. Despite the fact that English is the native language of African American Muslims, in certain contexts, English becomes inadequate—unable to meaningfully describe social realities. Moreover, because of the cultural frameworks African American Muslims bring to Islamic practice, the sociolinguistic meanings of Arabic words can be related to both a religious (Islamic) context and parallel meanings found within the context of broader African American culture. Further, I will unpack different ideas about the Arabic language by exploring its role in relationships of power among African American Muslims. By examining opposing language ideologies among African American Muslims, I will seek to determine beliefs regarding which ideas and persons are seen as "authentically" Islamic as well as which ideas and persons are seen as "authentically" *African American* Muslim.

My arguments are drawn from an analysis of the general African American Muslim linguistic context and specific incidences of Arabic use in interactions among African American Muslims. In the recorded ethnographic moments I present, I was a participant as well as observer; an anthropologist whose position in these social spaces was marked by ivy league pedigree, overseas study, gender, and religious and racial identity. Focusing on a community that is only beginning to be seriously studied ethnographically is both exciting and challenging. This chapter will not exhaust the possible analytical angles through which to approach this topic. However, what follows offers some notes—a series of questions and some thoughts—which will hopefully open up a conversation or stand as an invitation to carry out more research on African American Muslim sociality.

AN AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSLIM SPEECH COMMUNITY?

As a black woman of Caribbean and Latin American descent, a fourth-generation (mother's side) and second-generation (father's side) American, and a second-generation Muslim who speaks Arabic fairly decently, I certainly do not describe African American Muslims as a speech community to ignore the diversity that is characteristic of this community. African American Muslims are defined in this chapter as Muslim Americans descended from Africans enslaved in the western hemisphere, and those who self-identify as such. African American Muslims—poor, wealthy, working, and middle-class—live in America's inner cities, suburban enclaves, and rural communities. African American Muslims are thus, by definition, a heterogeneous speech community.

Therefore, my argument that African American Muslims constitute a speech community is not related to cultural or linguistic homogeneity. As Linguistic anthropological scholarship has shown, speech communities are not homogeneous entities where all members have the same knowledge of grammar and

culture, as well as the same ability to use language.⁴ Rather, African American Muslims constitute a speech community because they share the same context within which Arabic enters and functions in their linguistic worlds, although its manifestations, incorporations, and rejections are not strictly formulaic.

The Arabic linguistic context shared by African American Muslims is marked by two characteristics. Firstly, Arabic is not their first language; thus, for the overwhelming majority of African American Muslims, the encounter with Arabic is one that occurs through a process of religious conversion, be it direct (personal conversion) or inherited (conversion of a child's parents).⁵ Religious conversion, as Susan Harding suggests, "is the process of acquiring a specific religious language."⁶ Yet, if we understand language to be "a complex inventory of all the ideas, interests and occupations that take up the attention of the community," then conversion yields more than a new way to talk about and to God.⁷ The inclusion of religious terminology in ritual speech and, subsequently, in everyday talk, can be described as acquiring a means of expressing newer and rearticulating older worldviews and forms of sociality.

The second characteristic that shapes the shared Arabic linguistic context of African American Muslims is the racial politics of Islam in America. A major fault line in the American Muslim community is the question of who speaks and interprets for American Muslims—*indigenous* or *immigrant* Muslims. Within the American Muslim community, the term *indigenous* is used to describe Muslims whose ancestors were enslaved in the Americas, that is, African Americans and Latina/os as well as Native American Muslims and Muslims whose ancestors are Europeans but are not recent immigrants, that is, white Americans. The term *immigrant* is used to refer to Muslims who have immigrated to the United States within the last century and their children. This distinction is not nuanced to describe, for example, the Arab American Muslim family that has resided in the United States since the nineteenth century. Therefore, the distinction appears to be connected to a particular relationship to the United States, a historic relationship that African American, Latina/o, white American, and Native American Muslims share that American Muslims of other descent are presumed not to have.⁸

Outside of the American Muslim community, the term *indigenous*, particularly in human rights discourse, is meant to refer to *native* peoples or the original inhabitants of a particular territory who, based on their identity, claim rights to land and sovereignty against the hegemonic power of *settler* peoples. At this point, I have been unable to determine when this term began to be used in the American Muslim context; however, its usage is neither coincidental nor incidental but derives its power from this more common definition.⁹ By claiming to be *indigenous*, the *indigenous* Muslim makes similar claims: to be native and therefore have proprietary rights that predate those of the newly arrived, yet more socioeconomically powerful party, the *immigrant* Muslim.

The *indigenous-immigrant* divide is one concerning symbolic power, defined by Bourdieu as "[the] power of constituting the given through utterances, of making

people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby action on the world and thus the world itself."¹⁰ Specifically, the issue at hand is of legitimate religious authority within the American Muslim community—who has the legitimate authority to interpret for the Muslim community in the United States.¹¹ This issue of legitimate religious authority is tied to the cultural capital of the Arabic language in the global Muslim community. The ability to wield Arabic in social spaces invokes the authority of the Divine and thereby increases symbolic power—the power to name and define reality.

As noted earlier, Arabic is the *lingua franca* of the intellectual Islamic tradition from which follows the reasonable expectation that a technical competency in the language is one criterion to be considered in determining legitimate religious authority. A leap taken, which *indigenous* Muslims object to, is that technical competency is necessarily the equivalent of deep religious understanding. Moreover, as the majority of *immigrant* Muslims are not native Arabic speakers, *indigenous* Muslims also object to a related attitude that Sherman Jackson identifies as *Immigrant Islam*.¹² The idea that *immigrant* Muslims are, by virtue of national origin, technically competent and thus endowed with the deep understanding that confers religious authority.¹³ It is important to note that because of the cultural capital of Arabic among Muslims worldwide, Arabic will always be a trump in negotiations of symbolic power, even in contexts that do not include Arabs, like those of African American Muslims whose main *immigrant* interlocutors are South Asian.

The *indigenous-immigrant* divide is also marked by, and reflective of, the performance of race and racism in the United States. Particularly for African American Muslims, interactions between themselves and *immigrant* Muslims has proven that *immigrant* Muslims typically replicate and embody white supremacist attitudes toward African American history and culture. Indeed, the residential patterns and acculturation choices of the majority of the *immigrant* Muslim community seem to reflect this pursuit of whiteness and the prejudiced attitudes toward African American Muslims, spiritual brethren or not.¹⁴ This *immigrant* performance of race is particularly an affront as African American claims of indigeneity are further buttressed by the fundamental role of the African American Muslim community in the establishment of Islam as a legitimate form of American religiosity.¹⁵

With the patterns of social life within the American Muslim community reflective of the racial segregation that is commonplace in American society, African American Muslims tend to have limited incidences of face-to-face interactions with *immigrant* Muslims. Nevertheless, this tension is well known, felt to be shared experientially, and is the backdrop of interethnic relations within the American Muslim community. It is within this shared linguistic context, determined by conversion and racial politics, that language ideologies about the Arabic language have emerged within the African American Muslim community—ideologies that respond to the questions why Arabic should be used, how Arabic should be used, and by whom.

WHEN ENGLISH IS NOT ENOUGH

During the weekly study circle, Leticia, who has only recently released her first amateur rap album, informed the group that she had chosen the titles for the songs on her next CD: “one is gonna be called *sista fitna*.” Leticia then went on to describe an incident at a local Brooklyn mosque that inspired the title. Briefly, a woman brought food to the daily Ramadan break fast held at the mosque and refused to share the food except under certain strange conditions. The other members of the study circle were shocked by the woman’s action, particularly because it contradicts the overly generous behavior customary during the month of Ramadan. Upon hearing the details of this story, another participant, Jamillah, exclaimed, “Oh she [the woman] must be *majnoon!*” The other women nodded their heads and voiced their agreement to affirm Jamillah’s assessment. This scene concluded with a question by twelve-year-old Maisha, “What is *majnoon?*” I responded, “Girl, that just means crazy.”

Leticia, Jamillah, and the other participants in this story met every Wednesday evening in Queens, New York. This group of African American Muslim women gathered for the purpose of religious education where, during each meeting, the informal group leader shared information and led a discussion on a religious topic. I frequently attended these meetings and, despite the goal of religious education, socializing was a major element of these gatherings. The group’s size generally ranged between seven and twenty women and consistently began approximately two hours after the scheduled start time. The youngest participant in this group was twelve years old and the oldest was seventy but most of the participants were in their early forties and fifties. Most of the women in the group converted to Islam and had been Muslim for an average of fifteen years. The younger women, mostly teenagers, had been raised Muslim since birth.

The word *fitna*, used by Leticia in her future CD title, *sista fitna*, is defined as temptation, trial, and discord in Arabic. In addition to the literal meanings, the term is also generally associated with two historic concerns in the Muslim community: communal chaos and the temptation of women in (male) society. Among African American Muslims, I have observed that *fitna* is used to describe a variety of disappointing experiences in private and public life. For example, *fitna* may be used to describe the occurrence of an argument, losing a job, or a marital dispute. Therefore, Leticia’s use of *fitna* impresses upon her listeners the reprehensibility of the woman’s behavior because it evokes not only the literal meanings of *fitna* and but the sociohistorical understandings of the word as well. By evoking the meanings of *fitna*, the woman’s behavior moves from a matter of poor manners to a much more significant social ill.

In the light of associations between meanings of *fitna* and women, Leticia’s word choice raises the question if she created the title *sista fitna* because she interpreted the incident as another example of the *fitna* caused by women. Alternatively, did Leticia rename the woman *fitna* because her behavior is another example of the trials facing the Muslim community? The group’s conversation in reference to this story does not lend any evidence to support the first supposition. Moreover, *fitna*

has more than a gendered meaning, which seems to support the idea that Leticia would have used *fitna* to describe similar behavior by a male. Leticia confirmed the latter and said that she renamed the woman *fitna* because she “causes trouble wherever she goes.”

As with any language, knowledge of the possible meanings of Arabic words and phrases and when to use them is not an innate ability but is learned through a process of socialization—a process which includes both socialization through language and socialization to the use of language.¹⁶ Although she was being raised in a Muslim family and was a student at a local Islamic school, Maisha was not familiar with any of the meanings of *majnoon*. In Maisha’s question “what is *majnoon?*” we can trace this socialization process. Maisha, like the other adolescents at this study circle, attends at the behest (or perhaps command) of her mother. She is made to participate in the study circle as a means of introduction, clarification, and affirmation of what she *should* believe as a Muslim. She is also made to attend in order to be socialized to the concepts and practices that *should* be exhibited by a member of the *ummah*. The potential answers to her question (including my own) are meant to teach her what the word means, thereby building her “vocabulary” and ability to function with competence in a community in which Arabic is a common linguistic resource and tool. The different definitions of *majnoon* given in response to her question are also exemplary of the fact that shared or dominant meanings of Arabic terminology within the community do not go uncontested—they do not mean the same thing to everyone. Maisha is an adolescent but other African American Muslims, for example, converts, would be on the same learning curve and would encounter the meaning and use of Arabic words and phrases through a variety of spaces and practices, including study groups, Friday sermons, pamphlets and religious books, and other everyday events.

The discourse that emerges from these practices produces a lexicon that circulates within the African American Muslim community. The words that make up this African American Muslim Arabic lexicon are almost all nouns. This is a characteristic that Jane Hill identifies as “a sign of very restricted bilingualism, since it has long been recognized that nouns are the earliest borrowing in an incipient bilingual context.”¹⁷ Hill notes further that the category of words used also indicates the realms of interaction between the carriers of the loan language and the borrowers.¹⁸ Due to the ethnic segregation common within the American Muslim community, it is doubtful that the introduction of Arabic in the everyday speech of African American Muslims was the result of intimate contact between African American Muslims and Arabic speakers. The major Islamic movements among African American Muslims from the early to late twentieth century—the Nation of Islam, the community of Imam W. D. Mohamed, the Darul Islam, and others—were not tied to Arab communities neither in terms of spiritual authority, community leadership, nor social life. Furthermore, any relationships they did have were often tenuous at best.

In a separate interview with Saleemah, she noted that as a new Muslim in the mid 1970s, she attended a variety of Islamic meetings and conventions in which

her interactions with Arabic speakers, particularly men, were limited. Where gender might have facilitated more intimate contact between African American women and Arabic-speaking women, cultural distance reigned supreme, as even interactions between women never seemed to transcend the weekend conference milieu. Therefore, it is more likely that Arabic was introduced into African American Muslim speech through religious study and the elementary study of the Arabic language that was particularly common among African American converts in the mid- to late twentieth century. In the educational contexts of religious lectures and Arabic language classes, words and phrases drawn directly from the Qur'an, hadith texts and religious practice manuals, as well as simple everyday terms, were taught and retained by students. The ability of these students to engage in more advanced language study, due to financial and familial constraints, was often limited.¹⁹

Two words that exemplify this type of learning, retention, and incorporation are *umi* and *khimar*. It is easy to find many second-generation African American Muslims who were raised to call their mothers *umi*. *Umi* is an Arabic phrase that means "my mother," yet in the Arabic speaking world, and among Arab Americans, mothers are almost exclusively referred to as *mama*.²⁰ Similarly, in many African American Muslim communities, the headscarf that is worn by Muslim women is referred to as *khimar*, whereas among Arab Americans and in the Arab world, a Muslim woman's head covering is called *hijab*. Both terms are Arabic and are featured in the Qur'an; however, *khimar*, in its plural form *khumar*, is the precise term used in the Qur'anic verse describing female modesty.²¹ *Hijab*, in contrast, is used in the Qur'an in several instances that have "a common semantic theme of separation, albeit not primarily between the sexes."²² Thus, there is a distinctive adoption of the Arabic language in a way that is not tied to the norms of Arab culture, to which access is limited. These words and others, such as *zawj* (spouse) and *wali* (guardian), also follow this pattern of incorporation as a result of intensive interaction with religious and linguistic texts rather than an intensity of interaction with Arab Muslims. These words are subsequently used outside scholastic contexts and become commonplace in African American Muslim speech.

In an article that traces the use of broadcast radio parlance in everyday Zambian speech, Debra Spinulnik writes that "certain institutions provide common linguistic reference points" such that they function as the "source and reference point for phrases and tropes which circulate across communities."²³ These phrases and tropes are *public words*, defined by Spinulnik as "standard phrases such as proverbs, slogans, clichés, and idiomatic expressions that are remembered, repeated, and quoted long after their first utterance."²⁴ The concept of public words is particularly useful when analyzing Arabic language use among African American Muslims. Arabic terms are used in institutions such as study circles, hip-hop, and *dawah* (invitation to Islam) pamphlets, these institutions serve as shared linguistic reference points through which *Arabic public words* circulate among African American Muslims.

In the exchange transcribed above, Jamillah interjected a public word, *majnoon*, into the conversation to further embellish Leticia's description of *fitna* by the woman. By using *majnoon* she implied that the woman's behavior is not simply an error in judgment but a fundamental problem with her psychological condition and perhaps even more than that. *Majnoon* is derived from the root word *janna*, which means to become crazy and to be possessed. It is not clear to what extent the etymology of the word is known by all members of the group, yet it is the act of choosing an Arabic word as opposed to a potential English equivalent that is key—it illustrates the power of meaning that Arabic wields in this speech community. In essence, the English equivalents to these words—*fitna* and *majnoon* and others—are inadequate because they do not express the value and meaning this Islamic community has invested in Arabic terms and language. Moreover, although the English language may be inadequate, choosing Arabic terminology over English can also be an act that engages the broader contexts the African American Muslim performs within: American Muslim and African American.

The root word *janna* is also the etymological root for the word *jinn*, which describes created beings who, according to Islamic belief, have been given free will and live along side humanity but are unseen to the human eye. Like human beings, there are righteous *jinn* and there are *jinn* who are thought to work alongside Satan in attempting to thwart believers from righteousness. These types of beings are similar to the spirits that are part of African American folk traditions.²⁵ As Braziel Robinson, a former slave who claimed to be able to see spirits described, "my two spirits are good spirits, and have power over evils spirits, and unless my mind is evil, can keep me from harm. If my mind is evil my two spirits try to win me, if I won't listen to them, then they leave me and make room for evil spirits and then I'm lost forever."²⁶

Spirits, their existence, and their potential to do harm in human life is related to different practices such as conjure, hoodoo, and Christian spirit possession, which are undervalued by a general belief that the supernatural plays an intimate role in human life. The existence of the concept of *jinn* in African American folk tradition is important because it is through familiarity with the supernatural through these traditions that African American Muslims can make an experiential connection between a religious concept and their profane reality. The concept of *jinn* makes sense, it is familiar, and therefore resonates culturally because it reflects and reaffirms a preconversion cultural belief. This is particularly important because racial divides within the American Muslim community preclude African American Muslims access to an experience of the supernatural through the stories that circulate amongst their *immigrant* brethren. Thus, certain Arabic words, such as *majnoon*, should be seen as *doubly* meaningful because they reflect both a particular Islamic cosmology as well as a spiritual orientation that has roots in the Christian and folk belief traditions of African Americans.

One notable point in the discussion was my interjection, "girl, that [*majnoon*] just means crazy." As a participant in the conversation, I injected a definition of *majnoon* devoid of any sociohistorical meaning. This was motivated (admittedly,

heavy-handedly) by my personal concern with practices that might elevate Arab culture to the detriment of African American Muslims, under the auspices of being more "Islamic." By claiming that *majnoon* "just means crazy," I attempted to interfere with the socialization process by reducing the definition to only its simplest literal meaning. Yet it is clear that *majnoon* does *not* just mean crazy; embedded in its meaning are community beliefs on the supernatural and the authority of the Arabic language. In this moment and in the encounter that I recount below, my attempt at linguistic intervention is no match for a language firmly rooted in the discourse on what it means to be an African American Muslim.

SPEAKING IN GOD'S NAME

Recently, I was in the company of another group of African American Muslim women who had gathered for a Ramadan break fast at a home in Queens, New York. Arabic words and phrases were used in many different ways throughout the evening's conversations; here, I focus on one participant, Naimah, and her use of Arabic as a means of asserting authority. I have divided the evening's discussions into two parts, distinguished by two different patterns of speaking. During the first part of the discussions, the following pattern developed. One woman would tell an anecdote or give a personal opinion related to the topic at hand. Naimah would then interject by summarizing the speaker's narrative and providing her Islamic commentary on the issue. By Islamic commentary, I am referring to her habit of couching each topic in the context of the challenges (as she understood them) facing the world Muslim community. Whether using English exclusively or using Arabic as well, through the course of the evening's conversations, she asserted herself as a religious commentator on each topic of discussion.

Naimah was a powerful speaker because she used a variety of linguistic tools to make her points. Overall, Naimah used Arabic significantly more than any other speakers in the discussion. She used Arabic in two specific ways: (1) she used words commonly known to African American Muslims while emphasizing an Arabic accent in her pronunciation of these words, and (2) she recited Qur'anic verses in Arabic, with and without a subsequent English translation. Naimah was also a powerful speaker because her speaking style evoked the elocutionary techniques of African American Christian preachers and Muslim Imams (mosque leader) in terms of cadence and intonation. In the tradition of Imams, she used Arabic as a stylistic feature of her speech and thus the authority she wielded in the conversation was in part drawn from her ability, through performance, to embody the authority of an Imam. Through this technique, we find Arabic as doubly meaningful again, drawing significance from its religious authority as the language of the Qur'an and from the cultural authority inscribed in the style of African American clergy.

Through her "Islamic" reframing of the conversation, she was attempting to establish herself as the representative of the one correct Islamic authority. Her interjections did not simply move her into the position of speaker vis-à-vis the

listeners; rather, she promoted herself into the position of authority vis-à-vis those who must listen to, obey, and accept authority. Moreover, rather than embody the position of a speaker whose role is "animator, author and principal as one," I believe Naimah did not perceive herself to be the author of her speech.²⁷ She rarely used "I" statements when speaking; instead, she would consistently state that "we [Muslims]" need to "realize" or "understand" that Allah wants or says "X" and the *sunnah* (tradition) of the Prophet directs us to do "Y." Therefore it appeared that she perceived herself as playing the role of God's representative in the conversation, and her authority was derived from being the orator of God's speech. This perception—and the authority it afforded—appeared to be supported by the other women in the group, as in most cases she was able to deliver her commentary-monologues without interruption, interjection, or challenge by the other participants.

Her authority as God's representative drew on the preeminence of Arabic in the African American Muslim community. Wielding Arabic terminology is a common conversational tool among African American Muslims, especially in debates, because it implies a religious knowledge base; if you speak the *'Arabiya* you must know the religion.²⁸ This is, of course, the same claim implicitly made by *immigrant* Muslims as noted above, although in these speech contexts, there are no immigrants present. Much like the white normative gaze articulated by Cornel West, we can understand the language ideologies of African American Muslims to function under an *immigrant* normative gaze.²⁹ The contestations over authority and representation that define the relations of power between the *immigrant* and *indigenous* communities shape behavior, in this case, language use, even when the *immigrant* is not present. Yet although the *immigrant* Muslim is not present, his claims of normativity still function and are often hegemonic within interactions between African American Muslims. Therefore, Arabic language use is designed to shift the power to be authoritative in the discussion or debate to the speaker who has the ability to supplement their argument with the incorporation of Arabic words and phrases, whether drawn directly from religious texts or not.

Just as was the case in the *sista fitna* story, my participation in the conversation was particularly significant. My participation marks the second half of the discussions during which I consistently challenged Naimah's commentary-monologues. The first incidence of this followed Saleemah's narration of her conversion to Islam during a visit to a prison inmate:

Naimah: You know what I realized . . . for many people, for many people going to prison can be a life saving movement.

[In the background: Oh yeah. Sure.]

Suad: For most people, it's not.

[Silent pause]

Naimah (low voice): True . . .

Naimah (raised voice): But um, I have, I have that hope because right now I have two brothers.

As in the pattern of speaking that had developed in earlier conversations, Naimah interjects in order to provide her commentary, "You know I realized . . .," to which some of the other participants affirmed her comments with "Oh yeah!" and "Sure." My interjection was followed by a notable pause and it appeared as if Naimah was caught off guard. Her "True . . ." response to my statement was stated in a lowered voice and it appeared that, during the pause, she was processing this challenge to the pattern of conversation. However, she quickly regained her composure, conceded my comments, and resumed her commentary-monologue ending with a story of the positive impact of imprisonment on the behavior of her two brothers.

Yet from that point until the end of the conversations that evening, the pattern of speaking changed dramatically. I would consistently interrupt Naimah's monologues and challenge her Islamic commentary with my own personal opinions on what is religiously desirable. As a result of my resistance to the hegemonic religious impulse and in (I hope) deference to Naimah's right to her own opinion, I prefaced many of my comments with "I" statements. In contrast, Naimah continued to speak with authority about what "we [Muslims]" need to understand. The following sequence occurred during discussion about gender roles:

Suad: I don't think though, that what we need to do is, like, begin to sort of carve out particular sort of, like, cookie cutter roles for people to fit themselves into in their relationships with people

Naimah (interjects): But what we have to realize

Suad: What works, works

Naimah: What we have to realize is that, as Muslims, we have been sent down a *furqan*, a criteria, we have been sent down social roles . . .

Suad (interjects): and it doesn't say, it doesn't say, it doesn't say, stay home.

Naimah: No it doesn't say that, but Allah *subhana wa ta'ala* says clear in his *mushaf*, in the *Qur'an*, that the men are not like the women.

As the conversation moved through this discussion of gender roles to the discussion of polygyny, in which Naimah and I continued to argue opposing views, the other women were primarily listeners to our debate. As illustrated in the preceding dialogue, it also appeared that Naimah's use of Arabic words and phrases increased as our debate ensued. I felt the increase to such an extent that I felt compelled to respond in kind. I do not generally use Arabic to support my arguments, and so to reconcile this "weakness," I paraphrased Qur'anic verses in English in order to confer my opinions the same religious legitimacy I (and the other participants) had given Naimah's views *because* of her use of Arabic.

In the preceding speech events, Naimah adheres to one of the main language ideologies found among African American Muslims, which I call the '*Arabiya* ideology. The '*Arabiya* ideology represents the beliefs of African American Muslims who posit that the use of Arabic (along with the adoption of specific modes of behavior: dress, hygiene, social etiquette) should be incorporated in everyday life in order to be "authentically" Muslim. They argue that the effort to follow

God's law as understood through interpretations of the Qur'an and the practices of Prophet Muhammad leads to the total reevaluation of former ways of sociality, a reevaluation that has clear cultural ramifications.³⁰ For these African American Muslims, all practices that are associated with the Prophet Muhammad—from prayer to wearing a long robe to speaking Arabic—are Islamic activities, and therefore their adoption is encouraged, if not deemed necessary.³¹ Thus by deploying Arabic, Naimah lends what she believes to be the force of religious authority to her particular interpretations.

This is a technique that another dominant language ideology, the *black Americanist*, would describe as a misguided. The *black Americanist ideology* is the standard critique that challenges the discourse and practices of the '*Arabiya* ideology. The black Americanist ideology takes a position toward the Arabic language that is grounded in a definition of African American Muslim identity that insists on the primacy of the *Americanities* of African American Muslims. The black Americanist sees the '*Arabiya* ideology as an attempt to distance one's self from her African American cultures. Where the '*Arabiya* ideology intentionally adopts the Arabic language, this language ideology consciously resists the incorporation of Arabic outside of a strictly religious context. Rather than proving to be religiously authentic, they would argue that the '*Arabiya* practitioner is parroting the *immigrant* Muslim in a rejection of their *indigenous* self.

In her examination of Spanish language use among white Americans in the southwestern United States, Hill finds that "Anglos use Spanish, but in limited and specialized ways that support a broader project of social and economic domination of Spanish speakers in the region."³² Hill also notes that distortions in the pronunciation of Spanish loan words by Anglo speakers are the enactment of social distancing between the Anglo and Spanish speakers. In the case of African American Muslims, the opposite rings true. For most African American Muslims, incorrect pronunciation results from limited instruction in the Arabic language, since this speech community very consciously orients itself toward the *perfection* of pronunciation. This goal of perfect pronunciation is shared by both black Americanist and '*Arabiya* adherents. However, their desire for linguistic perfection is imbued with a different meaning and a different underlying motivation. For the black Americanist practitioner, the attainment of this goal is most often situated within a context of ensuring scholastic access to Islamic texts. For those who adhere to the '*Arabiya* ideology, they, like Naimah, work toward a goal of the perfection of pronunciation in order to *decrease* the distance between themselves and Arabic speakers. Doing so, they believe, will grant them greater religious authenticity and power.

Hill's insight directs us to consider how the use of a borrowed language indexes the value placed on those from whom the language is borrowed. The question posed by some African American Muslims is, does the value given to the Arabic language extend to Arabs and Arab culture? In the framework of the black Americanist ideology, as illustrated in the poetic verse below, using the Arabic language outside of religious activities is a practice that emerges

from a preference for Arab culture—a preference that arises from the devaluation of African American culture.

its like

your leader looks nothing like u then you follow the rules
but if he does you give him hell cause he's not taught by their schools
so u want to shape and mold me cause you find me obscene
you can have it cause Allah created me *fi absani taqweem*.

The preceding verses are from a spoken-word poem by California-based African American Muslim artist Kamillah Shuaibe. Shuaibe, raised among black Americanist African American Muslims, admonishes the African American Muslim who values the opinions and leadership of non-African Americans, precisely because they are *not* African American. She objects to their efforts to declare her immoral and reminds her interlocutors that her racial and cultural identity is divinely ordained—she, like all humans, was made *fi absani taqweem* (in the best mold).³³ Shuaibe's words are exemplary of the black Americanist ideology challenging practices such as Naimah's and questioning the 'Arabiya adherent's authenticity as an African American. The black Americanist interprets the practices of the 'Arabiya ideology as contemporary manifestations of the self-hate that has afflicted, and continues to affect, African Americans living in environments structured by and in the perpetuation of white supremacy. When Shuaibe declares she was "created *fi absani taqweem*," she joins African American Muslims who attempt to confront double consciousness with the possibility of blending their triple selves: black, American, and Muslim. This is an articulation of an African American Muslim identity that seeks to remain grounded in the history and contemporary reality of African Americans as the descendants of former slaves, as Americans, and as Muslims.

It is important to recognize that while these two ideologies have been depicted in stark contrast, there are consistent points of overlap or inconsistency within these ideological frameworks. For example, there are African American Muslims for whom the appropriation of the Arabic language becomes a conduit to connect not to an Arab Islamic tradition but to a different "foreign" tradition that is seen as familial: the African Islamic tradition. In the tradition of Afrocentricity, for these African American Muslims a diaspora framework is invoked through the adoption of the Arabic language, which stands a symbol of the grandeur of African Islamic centers such as Timbuktu, Futa Jalon, and the Sokoto Caliphate. This movement beyond national borders is seen as "an effective and expeditious means of breaking free of the master without imitating him and constructing a Black-american identity that does not contradict their sense of authentic self."³⁴ Therefore, in this diasporic context, the tension is not with blackness but Americanism; the relationship to the American self is ambiguous, ambivalent, or antagonistic.

Black Americanist resistance to Arabic is responding to the idea that an "authentic" Muslim identity that can only be created through the adoption of foreign cultural forms and practices. Yet even adherents of this ideology use

Arabic outside of a strictly religious context. They routinely give their children Arabic names and may use Arabic in greetings and as terms of endearment as well. In a conversation between Hannan, an African American convert of over thirty years, and her second-generation Muslim daughter, Hannan expressed a wish that her granddaughter is taught to call her own mother *ummi* rather than mommy. Hannan's argument was based on the idea that "we are Muslims," and Arabic was useful in this instance because it would mark her family members living in a non-Muslim majority country as Muslims. However, despite this particular wish, Hannan fiercely rejects the frequent inclusion of Arabic typically associated with 'Arabiya ideology. Frequency of Arabic language use may be the distinction that most clearly marks the difference between the two ideologies, and, for some, it is the flip side of another distinction—class.

Two second-generation African American Muslim women, Sabra and Latifah, attributed higher incidences of Arabic language use to class. They made a distinction between their middle-class families and other Muslims who were more likely to use Arabic frequently—African American Muslims of lower socioeconomic class. For them, these African American Muslims use Arabic to overcompensate—to make up for what they lack in financial and educational stature and, most importantly, in cultural self-confidence. Sabra described their own use of Arabic as either solely related to religious practice or "words that are affectionate or complementary because we [African Americans] are an affectionate and complementary people." In their interpretation, when they *did* use Arabic, it was conscious and used only in ways that would reflect self-love—any other use of the Arabic language was a laughing matter. Latifah is well known for calling friends and family while donning an obviously exaggerated Arabic accent to poke fun at the practice. Although their analysis unfairly generalizes African American Muslims of low socioeconomic status, their observation of a correlation between class and the use of the Arabic language may not be unfounded.

As noted by scholars on African American Islam, the Islamic impulse in these communities is shaped by ideological trends within the broader African American context.³⁵ Class and the Arabic language appear to dovetail when segments of this community respond to American racism through a separatism that is not (black) nationalist but accepts the framework of Immigrant Islam. In this instance, one's religious piety is in opposition to one's Americanness: to be a good Muslim means to reject America, including the institutions that are the standard pathways to economic success in the United States.³⁶ This rejection of America is then coupled with the adoption of the Arabic language, in limited ways, and other customs typical of the *immigrant* Muslim.

Scholars also note the irony of the fact that these African American Muslims eschew the mechanisms of success that their immigrant counterparts eagerly participate in, implying that these African Americans have become victims of a false consciousness.³⁷ Yet rather than simply be victims of false consciousness, these African American Muslims could be seen as making a rational choice as their class positions do not give them the freedom to choose *how* they are going to be American. The

only America they have ever known perpetuates poverty and injustice in their everyday lives, in ways middle-class African American Muslims may no longer know as intimately. Of course, their rejection is severely limited—they may not vote or attend college but they use metropolitan transit and accept U.S. currency for their income and oils.³⁸ Yet while their desire to reject America is not unproblematic, the choice might also be seen as creative: they imagine themselves as different, escaping injustice by traveling, through language and other practices, to those places their empty pockets, prison records, and poor education prevent them from reaching.

“AWW MAN, THOSE BINTS ARE CRAZY!”

Throughout this chapter, we have encountered examples of the way Arabic functions in African American Muslim speech events in gender-segregated environments, yet these techniques are used by both women and men. In fact, African American Muslim men may feel the powers of authority wielded by Arabic with more intensity than their female counterparts. In a patriarchal social context where men are primarily expected to be leaders for the African American Muslim community and in its interactions with the *immigrant* Muslim community, African American Muslim men are called upon to show a facility with Arabic more often. Moreover, in a U.S. context where an empowered notion of black masculinity seems elusive, Arabic language use may also be entangled in notions of femininity and masculinity among African American Muslims and how they structure relations of power between the genders.

In a conversation with Shaheed, an African American Muslim male who converted to Islam thirty years ago, he explained that “back in the days of ignorance we [African American Muslim men] used to use to say—‘Aww, man those *bints* is crazy!” Notably, he remarked that bint was one of the first words he learned upon his release from prison. Its meaning was explained as a relationship between the Arabic word *bint* (daughter or girl) and a woman as a *bent rib*. The idea of women as bent ribs is derived from a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad in which women are said to be created from the rib of men. This description is followed by advising men that a woman is like a bent rib and if a man tries to straighten the rib, he will break it; therefore, men should leave women as they are.

Shaheed acknowledged that the two terms have no technical linguistic relationship and he explained that the concept derived from a belief among African American men that women are emotional and this could not be changed. He also laughingly noted that the term was often used by the brothers who were considered most “knowledgeable” in the *deen* (Islam) at the time, which meant they had been Muslim for three to five years and had two to three wives on public assistance. Therefore, *bint* and *bent* were seen as linguistically related because of the similarity of their sounds and the persons whom they signify. He also insisted I include another interpretation of that saying by the twelfth-century Islamic

scholar Imam al-Ghazali. He informed me that al-Ghazali wrote that woman was not created from the feet of man to be below him, nor from the chest to be ahead of him, nor from the head to be on top of him, but from his heart to be loved by him and be his companion.

In a final Ramadan scene, an *iftar* in Brooklyn, New York, consisting primarily of young African American Muslim professionals, the topic of how the Arabic language is used was discussed. A group of men informed the women present about the ways *bint* is used to refer to them. One claimed that men would use that word in phrases such as “those *bints* are crazy,” and “you better get your *bint* in check.” The men interpreted this usage in two ways: (1) that *bint* became a substitute for the word “bitch” and (2) that *bint* was used as a power play—that through language the women in discussion and all women in particular are placed in a subordinate position in relation to men. Based on their interpretations, the use of *bint* is reflective of patriarchal behavior that can be attributed to particular interpretations of Islamic texts, particular beliefs within African American cultural contexts, and those found in broader American culture. As *bints*, adult women are, by nature, always girls, subordinate to men, and when “acting out,” bitches.

While greater study of these practices is warranted, the use of Arabic terms seems to reflect negotiations of power that occur both on the personal and everyday level, as well as in more public and scholastic spaces³⁹—spaces in which, scholars have shown, African American Muslims confront, combat, and concede to power by directly engaging religious texts.⁴⁰ Through this engagement, they are providing interpretations through language that undoubtedly inform everyday speech. In *bints*, *majnoon* individuals causing *fitna*; African American *umms* and multicolored *khimars*, time and time again, located within Arabic language use are the major discourses of the African American Muslim community in the United States.

CONCLUSION

African American Muslims use Arabic in specialized and strategic ways that express the discourses and desires of a community that is always functioning in a context that is simultaneously black, Muslim, and American. In this chapter, I have attempted to trace the life of the Arabic language for this community that merges multiple identities. Word choice—why *zawuj* is used to substitute for spouse while *sayyara* is not chosen for car—may emerge from an engagement with the Arabic language through texts; yet once the words leave their textual context, they come to life in relationships reflecting an engagement with Islam that informs the everyday—its highs and lows.

The discourse around the Arabic language within the African American Muslim community reflects debates of authenticity. Each ideology—Arabiya and black Americanist—attempts to draw a theoretical line in the sand, so to speak, declaring who is the real African American Muslim. To use Arabic excessively is the performance of “cultural apostasy”; to use Arabic too sparingly is the rejection

TITLES

Amir leader
 Wali guardian
 Imam religious leader
 Salafi follower of Salafi movement
 Bint female/bitch

COURTESIES/CIVILITIES

Shukran thank you
 Afwan you're welcome
 La no
 Na'am yes
 Mabrook congratulations
 Jazakallah thank you
 Kaifal hal? How are you?
 Tayyib good

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Iddat after-divorce waiting period for women
 Nikkah wedding/wedding ceremony
 Wālimā wedding reception
 Aqiqah newborn ceremony
 Ifar meal to break Ramadan daily fast
 Suhoor meal to begin Ramadan daily fast
 Salat ritual prayer
 Du'a supplication
 Jummah Friday prayer
 Taleem religious lecture, in many mosques typically held on Sunday

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

Fitna social chaos
 Kafir nonbeliever/non-Muslim
 Majnoon insane
 Deen religion/Islam
 Dunya this world
 Niyah intention
 Sunnah practices of Prophet Muhammad
 Da'wah call to Islam/prostelyzation
 Biddah innovation
 Haram forbidden
 Mu'tah temporary marriage

of the "true Islamic identity." However, in the practice of everyday life that seeks to respond to the African American Muslim here and now, those lines are consistently crossed and smudged.

Albeit in a slightly different direction, I will end by invoking the suggestion of John Jackson, Jr., that analysts consider sincerity an alternative framework to authenticity in the analysis of identity.⁴¹ Whether they use Arabic a little or a lot, these African American Muslims are the real deal. Through language and other practices they experience and bring into life identities, like those in the communities of the Amadou of West Africa and Symas of South Asia—identities born from the everyday negotiations of culture and faith.⁴²

APPENDIX

TERMS OF ENDEARMENT

Alk/Aki brother
 Ukt/Ukti sister
 Shaykh/Shaiikh elder/respected friend
 Habibi/Habibri loved one

FAMILY RELATIONSHIP TITLES

Um/Umi mother
 Abu/Abi father
 Ibn son
 Bint daughter
 Zawj spouse
 Jadda grandmother

PLACES

Bayt house
 Hamaam bathroom
 Masjid mosque
 Suk marketplace

CLOTHES

Khimar/hijab female head covering
 Kufi male head covering
 Jilbab long, loose female dress
 Niqab face veil
 Abaya long, loose gown
 Thobe long, loose male dress

Hijra	migration from United States to the "Muslim World"
Adaab	etiquette
Aqeedah	creed

THINGS

Stinja	from verb <i>istinjaa</i> : water bottle used to clean private parts after using the bathroom
Faloos	money

COMMANDS

Takbeer	Say: Allahu Akbar
Ta'al, ta'al huna	come/come here
Ijlis	sit
Uskut	be quiet/shut up

NOTES

1. See the appendix for introductory listing of Arabic terminology with translation, as used among African American Muslims in the United States.
2. For some examples in the non-U.S. context, see John R. Bowen, "Does French Islam Have Borders?: Dilemmas of Domestication in a Global Religious Field," *American Anthropologist* 106, no. 1 (2004): 43–55; John R. Bowen, "Salat in Indonesia: The Social Meanings of an Islamic Ritual," *Man* 24, no. 4 (1989): 600–19; Magnus Marsden, *Living Islam: Muslim Religious Experience in Pakistan's North-West Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
3. I respect and acknowledge the arguments against the perpetuation of U.S. regional hegemony through using the term "American" to solely refer to U.S. citizens and "America" to the United States. However, for the sake of brevity and grammatical ease, in this chapter, the terms U.S. and America will be used interchangeably and the related "American" will be used to refer to U.S. citizens only.
4. See John J. Gumperz, "The Speech Community," in *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 43–52; Dell Hymes, "On Communicative Competence," in *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 53–73; H. Samy Alim, *You Know My Steez: An Ethnographic and Sociolinguistic Study of Styleshifting in A Black American Speech Community* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
5. Although I use the term conversion in this chapter to refer to the process of converting from one belief system to another—in this case, Islam—it is important to note that among African American Muslims, the term reversion is often used as an alternative. Reversion is meant to reflect both the belief that (a) all human beings are born Muslim, that is, in submission to God, and (b) because a number of Africans enslaved in the Americas were Muslim, African American Muslims are seen as reverting back to their ancestral religion.
6. Susan Harding, "Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion," *American Ethnologist* 14, no. 1 (1987): 178.
7. Edward Sapir, *The Collected Works of Edward Sapir*, ed. R. Darnell and J. Irving (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999), 90–91.

8. I recognize that the term lacks nuance, yet I find it a useful trope to describe the relationships between these two communities, *indigenous* and *immigrant*, as I have seen it in the field. Therefore, the terms immigrant and indigenous when used according to these definitions will be italicized in the chapter.
9. The earliest incidence of the use of this term that I have found so far is cited in Sulayman S. Nyang, *Islam in the United States of America* (Chicago: Kazi, 1999), 143–47. Nyang cites the use of the term in the news publication of the Darul Islam, *Al Jihadul Akbar*, with dates of publication in the late 1960s.
10. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 170.
11. Although not addressed in this chapter, another question that emerges from this issue is the notion of legitimate political authority and representation in the relationship between American Muslims and different spheres of U.S. society, particularly the state and the media.
12. "Immigrant Islam embodies the habit of *universalizing the particular*. It enshrines the historically informed expressions of Islam in the modern Muslim world as the standard of normativeness for Muslims everywhere . . . And in this process Immigrant Islam's interpretations are effectively placed beyond critique via the tacit denial that they are in fact interpretations." Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 12.
13. Jamillah Karim notes, "Many young African American Muslim women felt that Muslim immigrants question African American Muslim legitimacy not because they know Islamic teachings better but because they consider invalid any expression of Muslim identity outside their own cultural notions of Islam," Karim, "Between Immigrant Islam and Black Liberation: Young Muslims inherit Global Muslim and African American Legacies," *The Muslim World* 95, no. 4 (2005): 503.
14. Nyang notes that conflict between indigenous and immigrant Muslims stems in part from the fact that "most immigrants [in the late 1960s] were . . . South Asian and Middle Easterners who generally perceive themselves as 'whites' or 'browns.'" Nyang, *Islam in the United States of America*, 144. For another analysis of this type of racial identification among South Asian Americans, see Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000).
15. See Karim, "Between Immigrant Islam and Black Liberation"; Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*.
16. Elinor Ochs and Bambi B. Shieffelin, "Language Acquisition and Socialization: Three Developmental Stories and Their Implications," in *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 264.
17. Jane H. Hill, "Hasta La Vista, Baby: Anglo Spanish in the American Southwest," *Critique of Anthropology* 13, no. 2 (1993): 153.
18. Hill, "Hasta La Vista, Baby," 145–76.
19. These constraints included the inability to pay for advanced Arabic language classes that would likely be held at academic institutions, the inability to afford overseas travel to study the Arabic language, and the inability, particularly for single mothers, to attend classes that conflicted with work and childcare demands.
20. The same is true for the terms used by African American Muslims referring to fathers, *abi* (my father) and *abu* (father) and those used by Arab speakers, *baba* (father).
21. Qur'an 24:31 refers to khimar in its plural form, "*wal yadribna bi khumurihina 'ala juyubihina*" (and drape their coverings over their chests).
22. Mona Siddiqui, Mona, "Veil," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Vol. 5 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2006), 412.

23. Debra Spitulnik, "The Social Circulation of Media Discourse and the Mediation of Communities," in *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 97–99.
24. Spitulnik, "The Social Circulation," 99.
25. Here I do not mean to imply that Islamic and African American folk beliefs are the only traditions that argue the existence of spirits or other supernatural beings, but rather that these are the sources of concepts of the supernatural that are particularly important to African American Muslims.
26. Alan Dundes, *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 378.
27. Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 145.
28. In the Arabic language, the word for Arabic is *arabiya*; in the field, I have noted the use of the Arabic word *arabiya* as opposed to the English translation, "Arabic."
29. Cornel West, *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999).
30. Nyang describes this type of African American Muslim as an assimilationist who takes on a consciousness that negates American cultural norms and adopts foreign Muslim cultural practices as "an alternative, and sometimes superior, identity to his original ethnic identity." Nyang, *Islam in the United States of America*, 73.
31. It should be noted that the question of what is specifically required by the mandate to follow the *Sumrah* (tradition) of Prophet Muhammad remains contested among Muslims across the globe.
32. Hill, "Hasra La Vista, Baby," 146.
33. This phrase comes from the Qur'an 95:4.
34. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 153.
35. See C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994); Aminah B. McCloud, *African American Islam* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Yusuf Nuruddin, "African-American Muslims and the Question of Identity: Between Traditional Islam, African Heritage, and the American Way," in *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* Ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad and John L. Esposito (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), 267–330; Edward E. Curtis, *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); Richard B. Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).
36. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*.
37. *Ibid.*
38. As I have observed, and as other African American Muslim interlocutors living in major U.S. cities have described to me, peddling incense and scented oils is a common alternative occupation of African American Muslim men.
39. In the case of African American Muslim women, one term that might reflect relations of power between the genders is *ati* (my brother). Many African American Muslim men call each other *ati* to reaffirm the importance of fraternity between African American Muslim men. I have noted instances where women, outside the company of men (though potentially within their earshot), mimic this form of address to poke fun at the practice. In their enunciation of the word and their gestures, they act out a caricature of a caricature. They reproduce an exaggerated masculinity performed by men whom they see as pretending to be the ideal patriarch. Perhaps, as their wives, mothers, and daughters—as the women who are the primary targets and potential recipients of patriarchy—they know intimately where their men meet and fall short of this ideal. The women not only invoke the term playfully but also appear to offer a critique of the performance of masculinity embodied in the use of this Arabic term.

40. See, for example, Carolyn M. Rouse, *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
41. John L. Jackson, Jr., *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
42. Amadou is the version of the Arabic name Ahmad common in West Africa; Syma is the version of the Arabic, Saa'ima, common in South Asia.