

THE FORMATION OF THE FIRST MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS IN AMERICA

Mavlonov Otabek Anvarovich

Turin Polytechnic University in Tashkent

ottabeck@mail.ru

ANNOTATION

The article elucidates the formation and development of Muslim organizations at the turn of the 20th century by using a lot of English sources. Besides, it gives important information about various Islamic organizations, their ideas and activities which are played great role in Muslims life of that period. Moreover, the author of the article focused on the role of the leaders of organizations in society and paid special attention to how their ideas conformable to the main dogmas of Islam. Particularly, the ideas of Moorish Science Temple of America and Nation of Islam have been sufficiently analyzed.

Keywords: Islam, Muslims, religion, America, organizations, mosques, members, converting, traditional Islam, Sunni, views, Afro-Americans.

INTRODUCTION

Because the population of the United States of America is consist of different nationalities and ethnic groups, their religious beliefs also differ from those of other developed countries by their diversity. Just as there are special organizations in any country that protect the interests of certain segments of the population or categories, the existence of many organizations that serve the Muslim population in that country shows that people of Islam have a special significance in society. During the speech a visit to the Egyptian capital, Cairo, in 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama noted that more than 7 million Muslims lived in the country at that time, that there were more than 1,200 mosques and that the Muslim population played a distinctive role in U.S. history[1,3-4]. As of today, more than 2000 mosques serve believers for their prayers in the country.

Despite the fact that the Muslim population came to Americas long ago, the first Islamic organization is considered to be the American Mohammedan Society, founded in Brooklyn[3,120][5,56-67]. Although the organization was founded in 1907 by a group of Muslims from countries such as Poland, Russia and Lithuania, until 1930 the society didn't have its own building. Even though the sphere of influence was not as strong as that of other religious organizations, by the 1950s the number of members of the organization had exceeded four hundred. In the subsequent activities of the organization, the development was almost non-existent, and gradually the influence of the organization diminished. By the end of the twentieth century, only a mosque reminiscent of this organization remained.

Another organization that played an important role in the life of the Muslim population in the early of twentieth century is the Moorish Science Temple of America. The organization was founded in 1913 by Timothy Drew in Newark [5,79]. Timothy Drew was born in 1886 in North Carolina, USA. His parents were reportedly slaves belonging to the Cherokee tribe. According to some historians, his father was Moroccan and his mother was from the Cherokee tribe.

Timothy Drew later changed his name to 'Prophet Drew Ali' in order to return the Moors to their 'original religion,' Islam, and to form a sense of self-respect and devotion. He tried to present himself as their leader [3,34-35]. Under his leadership, the organization's ideas began to spread throughout the country. By the time he arrived in Chicago in 1925, the movement had already spread to Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, and several southern cities [9]. During Ali's lifetime, the organization had more than thirty thousand members [2]. When Drew Ali arrives in Chicago, the city becomes the center of the movement.

In July 1929, Drew Ali died. After that, the leaders of the organization announced Charles Kirkman Bay as the 'Grand Sheikh' as Ali's deputy and successor. Drew's driver John Givens, claims that he is 'living the spirit' of the deceased's leaders, this led to the sparking divisions and chaos within the organization. Among those who parted ways were those who formed their own cohesive new organization. An example is Walls Fard Muhammad, the founder Nation of Islam, founded in 1930 [4,35]. As a result of demographic changes and internal divisions in the country, interest in the movement among young people has been declining. Today, institutions in cities such as Detroit, New York, Philadelphia and Chicago have an average of 200 members each, and most of them are elderly people [8].

Although the founders and members of the organization considered themselves as one of the directions of Islam, the influence of religions and religious-philosophical movements such as Buddhism, Christianity, Freemasonry, Gnosticism and Taoism was evident in the activities and ideas of the organization. The members of the organization adopted the idea that the African Americans living in North America were of Muslim-Moorish descent [10]. Within this institution, elements of basic traditions are intertwined in the formation of personality, the development of national pride and spiritual maturity. As a result, not only religious but also national views are reflected in the ideas of the organization.

'Nation of Islam' is another institution that has separated from the Moorish Science Temple of America and has played an important role in the lives of the African-American population in the United States for many years, considering itself a representative of Islam and Muslims. It was founded in July 1930 in Detroit by Wallace Fard Muhammad to improve the spiritual, educational, social, and economic well-being of Afro-Americans [11]. The members of the movement taught the black population national pride and the pillars of Islam (based on their limited religious knowledge. However, their views on Islam were far from traditional Muslim teachings. *Author*), and proclaimed Wallace, who was considered their leader, to be the 'Mahdi'[12]. After the mysterious disappearance of Fard Muhammad in June 1934, the movement came under the control of his follower and successor, Elijah Muhammad. Under his leadership, the organization has done great things. They build their own mosques, schools, and a number of properties in the United States and abroad, making the movement the richest and most popular Afro-American organization in America.

In the decades after the World War II, Elijah Muhammad's involvement of many people in the movement intensified. As a result, his ideas of nationalism became widespread among the Afro-American population. According to him, black people are 'God's chosen people' [13]. Of course, such ideas do not leave people indifferent, and the number of members increases sharply. During this period, the future leaders and activists of the Nation of Islam were Malcolm X,

Warith (formerly Wallace) Deen Muhammad, Luis Farrakhan, and before Elijah's death, the organization had 75 centers across the country [7]. It should be noted that Muhammad Ali (real name Cassius Clay), a famous boxer of that time, also declared himself a member of this movement at that time [5,87] and refused serving when he was involved in military mobilization in Vietnam. As a result, Clay was prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice. He was acquitted after a lengthy trial on charges of refusing to serve in the military [14].

After the death of Elijah Muhammad, his fifth son, Warith Deen Muhammad, took over the leadership of the organization. The heir stood out from other members and leaders with his progressive ideas. Because of Walls was born in a religious family, which gave him a sufficient understanding of the spiritual and scientific significance of Islam from a young age. Later, as a result of his devotion to the study of the Arabic language and the Holy Qur'an, he developed critical views of the teachings put forward by his father [5,90]. He took over the leadership of the movement and renamed the organization the 'Islamic Association of Western World'. The organisation later became the American Muslim Society. He tries to avoid his father's nationalist religious ideas as much as possible and to move in the direction that most Muslims believe because of his propensity for Sunniism. By 1978, under his leadership, most members of the organization had declared their conversion to Sunni Islam. Among them was the famous boxer Muhammad Ali who has been mentioned above. As a result, Warith Deen Muhammad will remain the person who caused the most people to become Muslims in the U.S. history. Of course, these actions of Deen Muhammad were not approved by the previous leaders of the organization, there were separations from the movement, and leaders like Luis Farrakhan founded their own organizations. This process continued until the successor resigned.

Luis Farrahan broke away from the renewed organization of Warith Deen Muhammad in 1981 and formed his own movement based on the first ideas of the Nation of Islam, based on the views of Wallace Fard Muhammad. After the resignation of Deen Muhammad, the organization was understood as the 'Nation of Islam' and continues to operate today.

Currently, the number of members of the organization is estimated at about 20 thousand to 50 thousand. The movement usually does not announce the number of its members. In addition to America, it has associations in countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Trinidad and Tobago.

Additionally, a number of Muslim organizations emerged in various parts of the country until the first half of the twentieth century. The 'Islamic Society' in Michigan founded in 1919, the 'Al-Masjid' Association in Chicago in 1921[15], the first branch of the Ahmadiyya Movement in the United States, the 'Islamic Society' founded in 1926 by the Egyptians, and the Islamic Propagation Center of America in Brooklyn in 1928, and some center and many similar organizations can be included in this list. The activities of most of the above-mentioned organizations did not last long, and the role of those who worked for a long time in the society was not so high. However, the activities of the Islamic Propagation Center of America in Brooklyn have been much more important in the history of the country's Muslims than others. Sheikh Daoud Ahmad, its leader, played a significant role in the organization's activities. The importance of Sheikh Daoud is underscored not only in the organization but also in the history of all American Muslims. He tried to spread Sunni teachings and argued for many years with

Drew Ali and his followers along the way. He bought a house in a village near New York and founded a religious community called 'Madinat as-Salam' (City of Peace). According to some sources, he went to Mecca in 1930 to perform the Hajj, where he met with King Abdulaziz ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia. He was later given the prerogative to propagate Islam in North America by the King of Saudi Arabia and Sheikh Khalid of Jordan [6,181].

Sheikh Daoud Ahmad opened 'centers' in many cities in the United States, and throughout his life he sought to convey the justice and purely humane ideas of Islam to the people[6,181]. He sharply criticized the ideas of leaders of religious organizations in the national spirit, such as Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad. Sheikh Daoud considered Islam to be 'a light that calls people to kindness, harmony and equality, regardless of nationality or race', and he worked with members of the movement on these ideas till the end of his life.

In concluding, we may say that most of the first Islamic organizations in America were founded by members of the African-American population for national and political purposes, and their ideas and ideologies were very far from the two largest trends in Islam - Sunni and Shiite. Even though they call themselves Muslims, their ideas are mixed with other religious teachings, and their leaders are deified or declared prophets, contrary to pure Islamic beliefs. Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad are clear examples of this. The history of Ahmadiyya, one of the movements that came to America to propagate its ideas, also confirms view that has been mentioned above. Of course, in all organizations there were no cases of mixing ideas with national or political spirit with other religious teachings, but their sphere of influence and role in society was not so important. Because at that time, when we talked about Islam, many people thought that the Moorish Science Temple of America or the 'Nation of Islam' and its members were embodied. In some cases, organizations such as the Nation of Islam have acted as a 'bridge' for many people to convert to Sunni Islam (Such as Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, Warith Deen Muhammad and a lot of his successors). Similar circumstances in North America, particularly in the United States, have led to the formation and development of other organizations since the second half of the twentieth century.

REFERENCES

- 1) Barack H. Obama. Remarks by the President on a New Beginning / Speech in Cairo University on June 4, 2009. – Washington: United States Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs, 2009.
- 2) // www.america.gov/media/pdf/ejs/archives/obama_cairo_speech.pdf Chicago Tribune, May14, 1929.
- 3) Edward E. Curtis IV. Muslims in America: A short history. Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- 4) E. U. Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism: The Search for an Identity. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- 5) Jane I. Smith. Islam in America. New York, Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1999. - P. 56-57; Edward E. Curtis IV. Muslims in America: A short history. Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- 6) Juan E. Campo, J. Gordon Melton, Series Editor. Encyclopedia of Islam. New York: Facts On File, Inc. An imprint of Infobase Publishing, 2009.

- 7) 'Muhammad's Temple of Islam', Muhammad Speaks, 4 Oct 1974
- 8) Paghdiwala, Tasneem (November 15, 2007). "The Aging of the Moors". Chicago Reader 37 (8). Retrieved October 13, 2009
- 9) <http://www.moorishsciencetempleofamericainc.com/MoorishHistory.html>
- 10) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moorish_Science_Temple_of_America
- 11) http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/organizations/n/nation_of_islam/index.html
http://noi.org/about_beliefs_and_wants.shtml
- 12) <http://www.biography.com/articles/Elijah-Muhammad-9417458>;
http://noi.org/about_beliefs_and_wants.shtml
- 13) <http://www.biography.com/articles/Muhammad-Ali-9181165?part=0>
- 14) http://www.muslimsinamerica.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17&Itemid=28