

Women living under muslim laws  
النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين  
Femmes sous lois musulmanes

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**A Woman's Place in the Nation:  
Analyzing the Discourse of the 'Nation of Islam'**

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"That was an army of Black men standing in front of me...They loved the message and they loved the Messenger,"

Minister Louis Farrakhan on the Million Man March  
(Arizona Republic, 1996: 6)

"No march, movement or agenda that defines manhood in the narrowest terms and seeks to make women lesser partners...can be considered a positive step,"

Angela Davis on the Million Man March  
(Pooley, E "To The Beat of His Drum" Time, Vol 143, No. 9, 1994: 2-3).

Riders on the New York City subway system view a constant flow of people—men, women, occasionally children—shifting from car to car, making requests. Money for AIDS victims without health insurance, assistance to disabled Vietnam veterans, support for a battered woman, homeless, with two kids in tow. Distinct from the down-and-out, and immediately recognizable, are the African-American men—hair closely cropped, faces set seriously, impeccably dressed in dark suits and crisp white shirts, almost eccentrically accentuated by jovial red bow ties—selling *The Final Call*, the weekly newspaper of the Nation of Islam (NOI), a Muslim group with nearly a 70-year history in the United States. Their leader is the controversial Minister Louis Farrakhan, head of the NOI since 1977, a figure on the national political landscape since the mid-1980s.<sup>1</sup> Now, nearly ten years later, his name-recognition rate has skyrocketed and he has been, perhaps begrudgingly, embraced as a man "to be included in the dialogue." Recently, his ability to mobilize people for the October 16, 1995 Million Man March (MMM) in Washington, D.C. made him ever more difficult to ignore.<sup>2</sup>

Farrakhan himself remarked: "I was surprised when I learned that 44 percent of the men that were there had some college education. Over 20 percent of those men had businesses; they were entrepreneurs.. Here's a black middle class that comes to a march called by a man who is

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<sup>1</sup> In 1984 when Jesse Jackson journeyed to Syria to negotiate for the release of a U.S. pilot, Farrakhan went with him, providing his Fruit of Islam as bodyguards. While Jackson's support for Palestinian right troubled Zionist sympathizers, it was his "Hymietown" comment and defense by Farrakhan which caused a rift with some Jewish supporters during his run for the presidency in 1987, and probably lead to a weakening of the "rainbow coalition" of voting interest he claimed to be representing. He subsequently failed to capture the Democratic nomination (Wills, 1990: 232-234). Jackson took part in the Million Man March (MMM) (Monroe, 1996: 1).

<sup>2</sup> Reports on how many people attended the MMM vary, as is usually the case with rallies in the U.S. capital, where the National Parks Service or police tend to underrepresent attendance, while those sponsoring events tend to overestimate. In this case the figures ranged from 400,000 to 1,5 million (CNN, 1995:1). Not in dispute, though is that the MMM drew an extremely large number of people to Washington, D.C.

considered radical, extremist, anti-Semitic, anti-white. What does that say about the hunger, the yearning, of that black middle class?" (quoted in Gates, 1996: 150). The NAACP, the largest and oldest civil rights organization in the United States, did not endorse the MMM, but "many of its leaders and members enthusiastically participated" (Lusane, 1996: 3). Recently, Benjamin Chavis, a Christian minister, the former executive director of the NAACP, and a coordinator of the MMM, joined the Nation of Islam (Chavis, 1997: 3).<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the Million Man March, Farrakhan was well-known in the U.S. and capable of drawing large crowds.<sup>4</sup> Though Farrakhan says he does "not wish to have a movement built just on my charisma" (Arizona Republic, 1996: 10), he does see himself as a very important catalyst for change in the lives of all black men in the U.S. " ... I believe I am A Jesus, walking in the footsteps of THE Jesus, I saw that Million Man March in a scriptural light ... I saw my call of Black men, who are the biggest problem in the country, and their responding to my call as similar to Jesus going to the tomb of Lazarus, and calling Lazarus out of that tomb ... I am not THE Messiah, I'm clear on that. But I believe that I am a functionary of His," he told interviewers in 1996 (Arizona Republic: 2).<sup>5</sup> He enhances this perception of his "other worldliness" or "stature" by speaking of himself in the third person. A 1994 survey of 504 African Americans found that 73% were familiar with Farrakhan and two-thirds of that 73% viewed him favorably. His name recognition was higher than any other black political figure except Jesse Jackson and Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas (Henry, 1994: 2).

Beyond the U.S., Farrakhan has positioned himself as a self-appointed statesman, carrying the concerns of constituents overseas in meetings with various African heads of states.<sup>6</sup> His most publicized relationship has been with Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, who pledged \$1 billion in

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<sup>3</sup> As head of the NAACP for 16-months, Chavis is credited with rejuvenating an organization perceived to be increasingly middle class, stodgy and out-of-touch with the concerns of the majority of black Americans. During his tenure, membership increased from 75,000 to 650,000 and networking with other organizations within the black community (including the NOI) increased. Chavis appointed attorney Lewis Myers Jr., former legal adviser to Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan, as his deputy director. Chavis was forced to step down from his post in 1994 when it was revealed that he had secretly paid an estimated \$350,000 of NAACP funds for the out-of-court settlement of a sexual harassment case filed by his former executive assistant Mary Stansel. Prior to that, Chavis alienated black labor groups by lobbying in favor of NAFTA, despite a national NAACP decision to oppose the trade pact. Chavis also angered those involved in the environmental justice movement by lobbying Congress in favor of legislation weakening requirements for polluters to clean up contaminated sites (Daniels: 4).

<sup>4</sup> "In Atlanta a lecture by Farrakhan outdrew a 1992 World Series game the same night. In Los Angeles last October he filled the 16,500-seat Sports Arena," one reporter noted in 1994. "In New York City a December speech ... drew 25,000 ... This month in Chicago, when black aldermen needed a celebrity speaker to raise funds for their legal defense in a censorship case, they did not turn to Jackson or Chavis or Mfume but to Farrakhan, the one black man they felt could fill any hall in town" (Henry: 2). The references are to Rev. Jesse Jackson, civil rights activist, founder of Operation PUSH in Chicago, and presidential contender; Benjamin Chavis, discussed above; and Kweisi Mfume, Democratic congressman from Maryland and former head of the Congressional Black Caucus, until his departure in February 1996 to take up the role of President and CEO of the NAACP. Mfume spoke at the MMM.

<sup>5</sup> Farrakhan is of the opinion that he is misunderstood by many people in the U.S. or that his views are misrepresented due to a lack of accurate information, therefore it is important to note that this interview, which appeared in a mainstream daily newspaper, is available at the Nation of Islam website.

<sup>6</sup> For example, among the "power brokers" Farrakhan discusses meeting and conferring with are: President Rawlings in Ghana, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, former president of Zambia, President Moi of Kenya, President Museveni of Uganda, John Garang, head of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, and President Mobutu of Zaire (Gates, 1996: 165, 167).

aid to Farrakhan to finance the work of the NOI in the United States (NOI, Aug. 29, 1996).<sup>7</sup> The U.S. Treasury Department blocked the gift, denying a request to waive the 1996 Antiterrorism Act which makes financial transaction illegal with countries the U.S. State Department deems to be supporters of international terrorism.<sup>8</sup>

Given these various realms of activity, Farrakhan and the NOI, I believe, form a movement that is deserving of closer scrutiny. In this paper I will analyze the discourse of the Nation of Islam. I will base my analysis largely on NOI documents and speeches, as well as interviews with Louis Farrakhan which have appeared in a variety of media outlets in the United States. After reviewing the history of the group, I will discuss how the NOI has constructed its own notion of community and what this means in terms of relationships with others, including other Islamic groups and the state. To understand the role of the NOI, it is also necessary to summarize the development of black nationalism in the U.S., the legacy of such ideology, and the NOI's place in the chronology of that movement. Finally, I will focus on the ideal vision of gender roles presented within NOI discourse and specifically examine how women's roles include serving as identity markers for the community. While the organization has achieved a higher profile due to mainstream media coverage, I believe the implications of their message regarding gender roles has not been sufficiently discussed. In conclusion, an examination of the context in which this contemporary movement operates will reveal the possibilities for acceptance or rejection of the NOI's message within its target constituency.

### **Islam in the U.S.: The Origins of the NOI**

The Nation of Islam was founded in 1930 by Wali Farad Muhammad (born Wallace D. Fard) a door-to-door salesman who appeared in Detroit. "On July the Fourth, the day of America's Independence celebration, He announced the beginning of His mission which was to restore and to resurrect His lost and found people, who were identified as the original members of the Tribe of Shabazz from the Lost Nation of Asia. The lost people of the original nation of African descent, were captured, exploited, and dehumanized to serve as servitude slaves of America for over three centuries," explains Tynetta Muhammad (1996: 1), wife of Elijah Muhammad, the man who was the founder's protégé and assumed leadership of the NOI in 1934, when Fard mysteriously disappeared.

Fleeing internal power struggles, Elijah Muhammad moved the group to Chicago (Mamiya, 1983: 251). While in prison for resisting the World War II draft, Elijah Muhammad realized the untapped potential of recruiting followers among the prison population. He successfully pursued this strategy and by 1960 NOI membership had increased from a mere 8,000 in the 1930s to somewhere between 65,000 and 100,000 (Marable, 1992: 4).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> While Farrakhan says he will use the money to further voter registration (notoriously low among Western industrialized countries, for example, only 54% of black voters cast ballots in the 1992 presidential election, according the U.S. Bureau of the Census) "humanitarian uses," and "improving the economic lot of African-Americans," critics fear a move by Gadhafi to establish a stronghold within the United States (Hurst, p.2). Travel bans to Libya have not prevented Farrakhan from traveling there, according to news reports. If Farrakhan's passport is not stamped by Libyan officials, he is technically not in violation of the ban (Hurst: 2). Farrakhan, along with his wife, daughter, Chavis, and other colleagues, arrived in Tripoli on Aug. 28, 1996, received his award, telling Gadhafi: "While I accept the honor of the prize, I will ask you to hold the money until this matter is decided in a court of law" (NOI press release, Aug. 31, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> At the time of the decision, Libya was one of seven such nations given this distinction by the U.S. government (Hurst, 1996: 1). An executive order in effect since 1986 also "freezes Libyan assets in the U.S. and prohibits transfers of funds `even when those transfers are made for charitable, religious or humanitarian purposes.'" (Hurst, 1996: 1). In addition, Gadhafi selected Farrakhan as the 1996 recipient of a \$250,000 humanitarian award, which, due to the U.S. government also remains uncollected (NOI, Aug. 26, 1996, Hurst, 1996: 2).

<sup>9</sup> Today, the NOI is not forthcoming with membership numbers. Membership has been estimated to range from 30,000 to 200,000 (Henry, 1994: 5).

Malcolm Little, a hustler in New York and Boston, was one of these prison converts. Upon his release in 1952 he took the name Malcolm X, began preaching at Temple 11 in Boston, and by 1955 was minister of the NOI's Temple No. 7 in Harlem. He rose to prominence and became the public face of the NOI.<sup>10</sup>

Louis Eugene Walcott, a calypso singer known as "The Charmer," first heard Elijah Muhammad preach in 1955. A few months later he heard Malcolm X and went on to become his devoted student. He became Louis X and in 1957 took over at Temple 11 (Gates, 1996: 141-142). Regarding his conversion, Farrakhan explains: "I wasn't looking for a change in religion. I wanted a change in the status of black people" (quoted in Gates, 1996: 149). Meanwhile, civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP and CORE, concerned that the rhetoric of the Muslim group aided the cause of white supremacists, denounced the NOI, some even suggesting similarities between the NOI and earlier European fascism (Marable, 1992: 5).

By 1962 Malcolm X had become the NOI's principal spokesperson. But his increasing focus on contemporary political issues posed a threat to the autocratic Elijah Muhammad.<sup>11</sup> In 1963 he was confronted by the hypocrisy of Elijah Muhammad—two secretaries filed paternity suits against the married NOI leader, who preached a monogamous marriage-based code of ethics, and though he admitted he had fathered four children as a result of these extramarital affairs, no sanctions were issued (Marable 1992: 6).

In 1964 Malcolm X broke with the NOI, while Louis Farrakhan remained a devoted follower of Elijah Muhammad. Farrakhan denounced his former teacher, saying that "Such a man as Malcolm is worthy of death" (Gates, 1996: 142). Farrakhan became Elijah Muhammad's top representative (Gates, 1996: 142). Malcolm X, meanwhile, became El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, took up an anti-racist, anti-capitalist line,<sup>12</sup> formed Muslim Mosque Incorporated and a few months later the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU).<sup>13</sup> In 1965 Malcolm X was assassinated at an OAAU rally. Three NOI followers were convicted in connection with the murder.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Much has been written about the work of Malcolm X and the evolution of his beliefs. Unfortunately, a thorough account is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>11</sup> Elijah Muhammad had founded a NOI newspaper called *Muhammad Speaks*. Marable notes that analysis of black issues reveals that at the time Malcolm X began to change his message, coverage of his beliefs was eliminated: "In 1962 there are virtually no articles published on Malcolm X. By 1963, nothing. He is the main spokesperson of this organization, and the Nation of Islam's newspaper carries not a word about him" (Marable, 1992: 6).

<sup>12</sup> "Malcolm broke with the logic of political reformism," writes Marable (1992: 7). "Criticizing the Negro middle classes commitment to private enterprise, Malcolm also had learned on his trip to Africa that black revolutionaries abroad had broken with their commitment to corporate capitalism and defined the economics of liberation with the term 'socialism'. Malcolm said: 'You can't have racism without capitalism. If you find antiracists, usually they're socialists or their political philosophy is that of socialism'". Marable also notes that Malcolm X was beginning to question strict patriarchal gender roles, recognizing the struggle of women against oppression: "He moves away from the blatant sexism of Islam is his later development. He recognizes from his experiences in Africa that all progressive nationalist movements have recognized the fundamental equality of women of color ... Malcolm says this in December 1964: 'It's noticeable that in the Third World Societies, where they have put women in the closet and discouraged her from getting sufficient education and don't give her the incentive by allowing her maximum participation in whatever area of the society in which she's qualified, they kill her incentive and kill her spirits'" (quoted in Marable, 1992: 8).

<sup>13</sup> While the Mosque was meant to deal with religious issues, the OAAU was set up as a secular organization, and it was through this group that Malcolm X sought to mobilize people to petition the United Nations, charging that the U.S. government had violated the human rights of its black citizens (Pinkney, 1976: 70-72).

<sup>14</sup> In Jan. 1995, thirty years after the killing, discussion of the link between Farrakhan and the assassination of Malcolm X was revived due to FBI allegations that Qubilah Shabazz, the

Elijah Muhammad died in 1975 and surprisingly leadership of the NOI went to his son, Wallace Deen Muhammad. He who had sided with Malcolm X in the 1960s, had questioned the teachings of his father, preferring the teachings of Sunni Islam instead, and had actually been thrown out of the NOI (Gates, 1996: 142). He immediately began to transform the group,<sup>15</sup> declaring that "there will be no such category as a white Muslim or a black Muslim. All will be Muslims. All children of God" (quoted in Mamiya, 1983: 249) and changed his own name to Warith Deen Muhammad, not wanting to be "symbolically" linked to NOI founder Wallace Fard (Lincoln, 1983: 229). He relaxed the strict disciplinary rules and dress codes his father had enforced, allowed women to go out alone at night and encouraged participation in sports, music, voting, and flew the U.S. flag. Most significantly, he called off the race war his father had preached as inevitable (Lincoln: 227-228), clearing a path toward courting more middle class followers, who, as Mamiya suggests, perceived themselves as "part of the system" (1983: 248-249). Otherwise, he continued to recommend a lifestyle of hard work and self-betterment for his followers.<sup>16</sup> The name of the organization was changed to the World Community of Al-Islam in the West and then, four years later, to the American Muslim Mission (Lincoln: 228).

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34-year-old daughter of Malcolm X, hired a hit man to kill Farrakhan, in revenge for the assassination of her father. The credibility of the charge was called into question due to the troubled history of the government informant in the case, Michael Fitzpatrick, a former high school classmate of Shabazz, as well as the FBI's own involvement in the systematic destabilization and destruction of civil rights groups and other organizations involved in the black liberation movement (Van Biema, 1995: 1-3). It was revealed that Fitzpatrick, a long-time informant and provocateur desperate to escape prosecution on cocaine charges, had been paid \$45,000 to target Shabazz. The charge was dropped by May (CCR, 1995: 30).

In 1994, Farrakhan and the NOI filed suit against the *New York Post*, naming various other defendants (including *Post* chairman Rupert Murdoch and columnist Jack Newfield) charging libel and seeking \$4.4 billion in "relief" for an article and headlines referring to Betty Shabazz's allegations of Farrakhan's involvement in her husband's death and statements such as the following:

"New evidence from FBI files has established that Farrakhan was in the Newark temple of the NOI at the hour Malcolm was assassinated in Harlem. He was supposed to be in Boston, where he was the chief minister. Farrakhan drove from Boston to Newark at 1:30 a.m. on February 21, 1965, according to FBI files. This is relevant because the four assassins named by Thomas Hayer—who is still in prison for the murder—as his co-conspirators were all members of the Newark mosque, which was allied with Farrakhan ... Kenyatta told the *Post* ... that former Fruit of Islam leader Ysef Shah admitted to him before his death last year that 'Farrakhan was personally involved in the planning of Malcolm X's assassination'" (quoted in J. Muhammad: 1-3).

As Marable notes, the FBI had already infiltrated the NOI by the 1940s, and their surveillance of Malcolm X in the 1960s is well-documented (1992: 5). To what extent Farrakhan really was involved in the plan to kill Malcolm X and whether or not the killing was orchestrated by the FBI or CIA is still hotly debated (though Farrakhan does admit to assisting in creating the "atmosphere" that facilitated his death, as noted in Gates, 1996, p. 142). It is interesting to note that the NOI includes on their website some FBI documents regarding the need to manipulate the direction of the group following the death of Elijah Muhammad. Does this selective choice of FBI documents point to an attempt to gain credibility with leftists who are familiar with FBI COINTELPRO operations during the 1960s? Was the resurrection of the link between Farrakhan and Malcolm X's assassination shortly before the MMM coincidental? Due to lack of space, I will leave this line of thought to be taken up by conspiracy theorists.

<sup>15</sup> In his history of the group, C. Eric terms it a "decultification" (1983: 224).

<sup>16</sup> Writing in 1963 about the NOI, Moynihan (discussed below) and Glazer note that they were referred to as "Black Puritans" who looked down upon the sins of indulgence—gambling, drinking, promiscuity—in favor of devotion to business as the route to wealth and success (1963: 83). Under Warith Deen Muhammad the American Muslim Mission was able to garner a \$22 million Department of Defense contract to manufacture military c-rations (Lincoln, 1983: 229).

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In 1977, Farrakhan left to establish a new Nation of Islam, promising a revival of the original teachings of Wallace Fard and Elijah Muhammad. He took with him many members of the highly trained elite paramilitary group, known as the Fruit of Islam (FOI), that Warith Deen had disbanded.<sup>17</sup> In the 1980s and '90s the FOI have been deployed in various capacities—as bodyguards for prominent individuals and as private security forces hired to help stamp out illegal drug trade in public housing complexes.<sup>18</sup>

This schism led other established Muslim groups in the U.S. to recognize Warith Deen's group, dismissing the NOI as not representative of "real" Islam and disseminators of misleading information on Islamic ideology.<sup>19</sup>

"The Black Muslims of the 'Nation of Islam,' with their notion of Black supremacy, 'were not Muslims at all by any definition of the word at first,' but have recently adopted real Islam and in 1976 fasted Ramadan for the first time. Now they are known as Bilalians, named for the Ethiopian who was the meuzzin for the Prophet Muhammad at the mosque in Medina. They are the 'World Community of Islam in the West' with Imam Warith Deen Muhammad as their head. He is also leader of their American Muslim Mission ...," writes Lovell in her overview of Islam in the United States (1983: 103, with references to Kettani, 1977).

"The original Black Muslim movement had basic beliefs that did not conform with Orthodox Islam," she writes. "There were: There is one God, called Allah, and Elijah Muhammad is His last Messenger; Allah appeared to Elijah Muhammad in the person of Master Wallace Fard Muhammad in Detroit in July 1930; and God is not a spirit, but a man. They also believed that heaven and hell are on earth at this time, that there is no life after death. Seven daily prayers and fasting during the month of December were other religious requirements."

While requirements regarding fasting, pilgrimage, and prayers do differ, it is in granting Elijah Muhammad the status of prophet that the NOI parts company with most other U.S. Muslim groups.<sup>20</sup> Mustafa Malik, director of research of the American Muslim Council says, "to be a Muslim, you have to believe that there is only one God and Muhammad is his last Prophet. The Nation of Islam people believe that Elijah Muhammad is the last Prophet. There is nothing in common except that we call ourselves Muslims and they call themselves Muslims" (quoted in Henry, 1994: 3).

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<sup>17</sup> Wallace called the Fruit of Islam (FOI) a "hooligan outfit, a hoodlum outfit" that "viciously" beat men for failing to sell enough newspapers. "He [Wallace] was shocked to learn upon assuming leadership that more than 10 believers were killed 'for no other reason than that they didn't want the FOI completely dominating their lives'" (Mamiya, 1983: 243).

Mamiya also notes that after the split there were "rumors of jihad between the Wallace and Farrakhan factions ... " and that both leaders traveled with bodyguards. "Wallace Muhammad has explicitly told his followers to ignore the Farrakhan faction ... Farrakhan's position is that 'we will not be the aggressors. But if they attack, the Holy Qur'an instructs us to fight back'" (1983: 251-252). Reference is also made to the self-defense training that the FOI have had and the prison background of many converts.

<sup>18</sup> The Nation of Islam Security Agency was reportedly paid approx. \$20 million by the Baltimore Housing Authority to patrol federally-subsidized public housing complexes in the Maryland capital. Though residents praised their efforts over five years, Congressman Peter King of New York and various Jewish organizations successfully lobbied to have the contracts severed, claiming that in their contacts with residents the security forces were spreading "Farrakhan's message of hate," in violation of federal anti-discrimination laws (Detroit News, 1995: 1).

<sup>19</sup> The Islamic Society of North America, cites the 1994 *Encyclopedia Britannica's* estimates of more than 3.3 million Muslims residing in North America. Haddad (cited in Lovell, 1983: 94) put the number of Muslims in the U.S. alone, at 3 million in 1979.

<sup>20</sup> Item # 12 in the NOI's list of "What the Muslims Believe" states that "We believe that Allah (God) appeared in the Person of Master Fard Muhammad, July, 1930; the long awaited "Messiah" of the Christians and the "Mahdi" of the Muslims" (NOI, "The Muslim Program," 3).

M. Amir Ali, of the Institute of Information & Education, also finds this deviation from Muslim ideology troubling. "Elijah Muhammad was a 'Messenger of Allah.' Are there any more messengers or prophets to come?" he asks (Ali: 1). The Institute of Islamic Information & Education, located in Chicago, makes it their business to disseminate what they perceive to be "true and correct information about Islam ... taking corrective action for the removal of misinformation and false perceptions which exist in the American society about Islam and Muslims." The NOI does not practice the Islamic religion, they say, but "Farrakhanism."

"Such religion should be considered a pseudo Islamic cult," writes Ali in his "Comparison Between Islam and Farrakhanism" which echoes Lovell's critique of the NOI, detailing 12 major instances where the tenets of "Farrakhanism" contradict Islamic beliefs. "In America there are many pseudo-Islamic cults, Farrakhanism being one of them. An honest attitude on the part of such cults should be not to call themselves Muslims and their religion Islam. Such an example of honesty is Bahaism which is an off-shoot of Islam, but Bahais do not call themselves Muslims nor their religion, Islam" (Ali: 3).<sup>21</sup>

"Elijah Muhammad ... outraged true Muslims with his statement that 'Every white man knows his time is up,'" writes Lovell. "Therefore, it is easy to see why, as recently as 10 years ago, Muslims in America considered the Blacks a great danger to Islam and to themselves. One can also understand how the changes urged by Malcolm X caused the schism ... " (1983: 104).

It is the NOI's portrayal of the creation and destruction of the world, with its significant focus on the issue of race, that seems to be unique and thus highly contentious for other Muslims in the U.S.

Farrakhan, citing Elijah Muhammad, states that black people are the "original people of the earth. Out of us came all other races" (1996e: 1). The tone is more a science fiction story of gene-splicing and hybrid peoples along the lines of Frankenstein's monster, than a theory of evolution. Elijah Muhammad teaches that it was a renegade black scientist named Yakub who, in defiance of Allah, created the white race nearly 7,000 years ago. The world has been in decline ever since. The fall of white rule is prophesied (Gates, 1996: 144, 163-4). Elijah Muhammad explained that America, the "unjust" world created by whites, is "number one on God's list to be destroyed," because of their mistreatment of blacks (Farrakhan, 1996a: 2).<sup>22</sup> The destruction prophesied involves a \$ 15 billion giant "Motherplane" or UFO (as Farrakhan says whites would term it) built by Japanese scientist, laden with bombs. "The final act of destruction will be that Allah will make a wall out of the atmosphere over and around North America." A fire will burn for 310 years, and not cool off for another 690. America can be saved<sup>23</sup> by changing "her way of thinking" and embracing a "righteous code of conduct" (Farrakhan, 1996a: 2-4). Interestingly, the immoral "America" that needs to be disciplined is feminized—referred to as "she". The vehicle of destruction—"a motherplane"—also could be interpreted as conjuring up feminine, though more maternal, power).

Farrakhan often quotes the Bible, perhaps taking from Christianity to connect with a wider audience. Ali notes that the writings of the NOI place contradictory emphasis on the Qur'an and the Bible. "On one side, ... Believe in the Holy Qur'an and in the scriptures of all the Prophets of God, and on the other side, We, the original nation of the earth ... are the writers of the Bible and Qur'an. We make such history once every 25,000 years ... it is done by twenty-four of our scientists ... Both the present Bible and the Holy Qur'an must soon give way to the Holy Book ... " (Ali: 2)

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<sup>21</sup> On this note, Henry points to other groups that might fall into the same category as the NOI. "Several of the 17 or more American black Muslim sects—including one in Atlanta run by the '60s civil rights radical formerly known as H. Rap Brown—depart from orthodoxy," he writes (1994: 3).

<sup>22</sup> Farrakhan explains that blacks are the most oppressed in the U.S., not native Americans because some are still able to speak their language and know something of their history (1996a: 2).

<sup>23</sup> It's not clear what Canadians should do during all of this.

## **Black Nationalism**

Manning Marable explains that "black nationalism as a political and social tradition would include certain characteristics. First, the advocacy of black cultural pride and the integrity of the group, which implicitly rejects racial integration. Secondly, an identification with the image of Africa which includes the advocacy by many of immigration or at least extensive contacts between Africans abroad and at home. There must be interaction, black nationalists would advocate, between African Americans, people of African descent in the Caribbean, and Africans on the continent of Africa itself. Third, black nationalism means the construction of all-black social institutions such as self-help agencies, schools and religious organizations and support for group economic advancement, such as black cooperatives, Buy Black campaigns, and efforts to promote capital formation within the African American community. Finally, black nationalism has also meant historically political independence from the white-dominated political system and support for the creation of all-black political organizations and protest formations" (1992: 3). Pinkney cites three elements which form the basis of contemporary black nationalism: "unity, pride in cultural heritage and autonomy" (1976: 7).

The NOI's "The Muslim Program," is made up of a ten-item list of "What Muslims Want" and 12 points detailing "What Muslims Believe". Item #4, on this list of "wants" states the nationalist goals of the NOI:

We want our people in America whose parents or grandparents were descendants from slaves, to be allowed to establish a separate state or territory of their own—either on this continent or elsewhere. We believe that our former slave masters are obligated to provide such land and that the area must be fertile and minerally rich. We believe that our former slave masters are obligated to maintain and supply our needs in this separate territory for the next 20 to 25 years—until we are able to produce and supply our own needs (NOI: 1).

Not only is there a territorial component, implying racial separation, in the NOI's nationalist ideology, but there is also a cultural aspect. During his MMM address, Farrakhan called upon the audience to support "African-centered independent schools" which would ensure that children receive a "culturally-rooted education" (MMM Mission Statement: 15). This is also discussed in "What Muslims Want": "We want all black children educated, taught and trained by their own teachers" (NOI, "The Muslim Program": 2). One of Farrakhan's standing demands to the government, outlined in the same document, has been that "all necessary text books and equipment, schools and college buildings" should be provided free of charge. "The Muslim teachers shall be left free to teach and train their people in the way of righteousness, decency and self respect" (p. 2).<sup>24</sup>

The nationalist agenda of the NOI is in direct opposition to integrationist beliefs.<sup>25</sup> Item #9 of "What Muslims Believe" explains:

We believe that the offer of integration is hypocritical and is made by those who are trying to deceive the black peoples into believing that their 400-year-old open enemies of freedom, justice and equality are, all of a sudden, their "friends." Furthermore, we believe that such deception is

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<sup>24</sup> The NOI is currently active on college campuses. In February 1997 the 2nd Annual Nation of Islam Student Association Summit, held in Chicago, attracted participants from all over the U.S. from 75 colleges and universities, according to a NOI document (NOI, "Successful Student Summit at Saviour's Day 1997, 1997: 1). Attendance figures were not available.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven define the belief in integration, in the U.S. context, as the idea that people "ought to reside in the same neighborhoods, go to the same schools, work together and play together without regard to race and, for that matter, without regard to religion, ethnicity, or class" (quoted in Rivers, 1995: 4). A major milestone in the battle for integration was the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision which called for the desegregation of public schools, abolishing the prior standard of "separate but equal" established by *Plessey v. Ferguson* in 1896.



intended to prevent black people from realizing that the time in history has arrived for the separation from the whites of this nation (NOI: 3).

"The integrationist idea was that the American racial caste system would be replaced with civil and political equality only through racial integration of schools, neighborhoods, and businesses, rather than—as a competing nationalist conception argued—through a strategy focused at least initially on building strong, autonomous Black institutions," writes Eugene F. Rivers, a fellow at Harvard Divinity School, on the two competing strategies (1995: 3-4). "To the Black middle class, this dream has had a measure of reality. For the Black poor in northern cities, integration was always hopelessly irrelevant. Nationalist critics understood that irrelevance; they predicted that the project would fail because of intense White resistance. They turned out to be right." Rivers suggests that it is the failure of integration that has facilitated the rise of such leaders as Farrakhan, whom he dismisses as a representative of a "nationalism of fools."<sup>26</sup>

The NOI's call for black nationalism as the remedy to black's socio-economic ills is not the first such prescription. Black nationalism in the U.S. reaches far back into the very roots of U.S. history.

"As a movement black nationalism has evolved through several stages, including colonization, emigration, internal statism, and cultural pluralism," writes Alphonso Pinkney (1976: 3-4). "These are the means blacks in the United States have advocated to achieve self-determination and ultimate liberation. The movement has never been able to attract a majority of blacks to its ranks, yet it has persisted through the centuries."

Martin R. Delany, a Harvard-trained physician and grandson of slaves, first opposed resettlement of U.S. blacks in Africa, instead preferring the West Indies, Central and South America.<sup>27</sup> Later, in an 1852 publication, he called for the formation of an "autonomous black state in East Africa to which Afro-Americans could migrate" and eventually rallied blacks with the slogan "Africa for the Africans," negotiating for the emigration of blacks to West Africa in the mid-1850s, before becoming caught up in domestic political and business ventures (Pinkney: 23-27). After Delany's death in 1885, Bishop Henry M. Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal [AME] Church<sup>28</sup> became the next leader of the movement for the "repatriation" of U.S. blacks to Africa.

"He constantly exhorted blacks to go 'home to Africa', usually in the pages of the Christian Recorder, the AME weekly newspaper" (Pinkney: 30). He supported the bill introduced into

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<sup>26</sup> "Leonard Jeffries and Louis Farrakhan are widely regarded, even by such experts as Cornel West, as representatives of the Black nationalist perspective. This is a serious misconception. Jeffries and Farrakhan, along with Tony Martin, Khalid Muhammad, and Frances Cress Welsing, represent the *nationalism of fools*. They are cynically anti-semitic, mean-spirited, and simply incompetent ... ," writes Rivers. "They are all demagoguery, uniforms, bow ties, and theater ... Their public prominence reflects the leadership vacuum created by a cosmopolitan intelligentsia lacking any pedagogical relationship to poor, inner-city Blacks—the natural outcome of a bankrupt integrationist project" (1995: 3-4).

<sup>27</sup> Note that while emigration movements were perhaps the earliest manifestation of black nationalism in the U.S., such movements were viewed skeptically by most blacks because these movements were first organized and lead by whites. For example, the American Colonization Society (ACS), formed by Congress in 1817, was supported by many political leaders at the time. Free blacks feared that the white-led and financed group would ultimately seek to deport all free blacks to allow for slavery to proceed more smoothly. It was the ACS that purchased (with Congressional funds) the land that was christened "Liberia." By the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War 13,000 African-Americans had been transported to Liberia (Pinkney: 16-22). It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the issues of exploitation, class and colonization that arose out of this appropriation of African Territory.

<sup>28</sup> The African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1786 by Richard Allen, a former slave. "This signaled the beginning of autonomous black Christian churches in the United States," according to Pinkney, who notes that previously, blacks seeking to practice Christianity did so at white churches, in segregated areas (1976: 17).

Congress to provide transport for any African-Americans wishing to leave the south of the U.S. to relocate to another country (it never came to vote) and founded the Voice of Missions, which became the organ of the emigration movement. He visited Africa several times and in 1894 founded the International Migration Society whose mission was "to accelerate the emigration of blacks to Liberia" (Pinkney: 31, 33). By the turn of the century both the society and the newspaper had gone out of business. "By 1906, after many failures and little success, Bishop Turner 'lost interest in the project and became deeply involved with local politics, trying to stop Georgia from disfranchising [sic] her black citizens'" (Redkey, 1917, cited in Pinkney: 35).

Perhaps most well-known in the pantheon of black nationalist men is the Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey, who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914 with the following aim: "To establish a Universal Confraternity among the race; to promote the spirit of pride and love; to reclaim the fallen; to administer to and assist the needy; to assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa; to assist in the development of Independent Negro nations and communities; to establish a central nation for the race, where they will be given the opportunity to develop themselves ... " (A.J. Garvey, 1970, cited in Pinkney: 43).<sup>29</sup>

Garvey came to the U.S. in 1916 at the age of 28. Four years later at the month-long UNIA-organized International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World held in NYC (reportedly attended by 25,000 delegates from 25 countries) he was elected provisional president of Africa (Pinkney: 45).

"We believe in the freedom of Africa for the Negro people of the world, and by the principle of Europe for the Europeans and Asia for the Asiatics; we also demand Africa for the Africans at home and abroad," stated article 13 of the Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World. "It is only a question of a few more years when Africa will be completely colonized by Negroes, as Europe is by the white race. What we want is an independent African Nationality ... It is hoped that when the time comes for Americans and West Indian Negroes to settle in Africa, they will recognize their responsibility and their duty," said Garvey, clarifying his viewpoint on territoriality (quoted in Pinkney, 1976: 46).<sup>30</sup>

Garvey opposed race-mixing, calling for racial purity and deeming "mulattoes" undesirables (Pinkney: 47-48). "I am conscious of the fact that slavery brought upon us the curse of many colors within the Negro race, but there is no reason why we ourselves should perpetuate the evil."<sup>31</sup>

According to Marable, "the Nation of Islam was the dominant black nationalist formation during the period after the Garvey black nationalist movement of the 1920s through to the black power insurgence of the 1960s" (1992: 4). The contemporary phase of black nationalism in the U.S. was ushered in by the black power movement in the mid-1960s.<sup>32</sup> Cultural nationalism, often

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<sup>29</sup> Farrakhan's Barbadian mother, uncle and Jamaican father were all "Garveyites" (Gates, 1996: 146, 148). The father of Malcolm X, a Baptist Minister killed when Malcolm was six years old, was also a follower of Garvey (Pinkney, 1976: 65).

<sup>30</sup> Ironically, the only "back to Africa" element put forth by Farrakhan these days appears to be a repatriation plan for black criminals proposed to the Congressional Black Caucus, almost the opposite of Garvey's view that " ... We do not want all the Negroes in Africa. Some are no good here, and naturally will be no good there" (A.J. Garvey, 1968, cited in Pinkney: 47). According to a member of the caucus, Farrakhan called for the transport of "prisoners and addicts to Africa as an alternative to the chaos of the ghetto—and was hailed for offering creative alternatives to standard treatment" (cited in Henry, 1994: 2).

<sup>31</sup> Later he wrote that "miscegenation will lead to the moral destruction of both races, and the promotion of a hybrid caste that will have no social standing or moral background in a critical moral judgment of the life and affairs of the human race" (quoted in A.J. Garvey, 1968, cited in Pinkney: 48)

<sup>32</sup> The phrase "Black power" was coined by Stokely Carmichael: "The concept of Black Power rests on a fundamental premise: Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks ...

associated with the work of Amiri Baraka and Ron Karenga in the '60s and early '70s, took up a more prominent role. At the time, Baraka dismissed Black Panthers as "violent integrationists"—leftists in service of a "white revolution" (Pinkney, 1976: 147). Karenga explained that "there must be a cultural revolution before the violent revolution. The cultural revolution gives identity, purpose, and direction" (quoted in Pinkney: 147).

### **Capitalism and the State**

Marable outlines two strains of black nationalism in the U.S. —conservative and revolutionary. Conservatives "emphasized African cultural values and supported frequently private economic market mechanisms for group advancement. In other words, they advocated a kind of black capitalism," he explains. "Revolutionary black nationalism concludes that 'yes, we are an African people and we can unite culturally with our sisters and brothers abroad, but we should also unite politically with them in overthrowing imperialism, overthrowing Western colonialism' ... radical black nationalists recognized that institutional racism has evolved in direct conjunction with the development and maturation of capitalism in the Western hemisphere over the last four centuries, that it provides the ideological and cultural justification for the continued exploitation and oppression of black people wherever they may be. So therefore the revolutionary nationalists said it is not enough to fight against racism. You also had to denounce capitalism as well" (1992: 4).<sup>33</sup>

Prior to his death, Malcolm X questioned capitalism and came to view economic and social questions in an international context, leading to a denunciation of imperialism and an approach that embraced international solidarity, not isolationist nationalism. "It is impossible for capitalism to survive, primarily because the system of capitalism needs some blood to suck. Capitalism used to be like an eagle, but now it's more like a vulture ... " he said in 1965.

Regarding emigration of U.S. blacks to Africa, he said in 1964 " ... what I mean by migration or going back to Africa— back in the sense that we reach out to them and they reach out to us. Our mutual understanding and our mutual effort toward a mutual objective will bring benefit to the African as to the Afro-American. But you will never get it relying on Uncle Sam alone. You are looking in the wrong direction" (quoted in Pinkney, 1976: 74-75).

In his MMM statement, Farrakhan spelled out his feelings about the U.S. Government:

Historically, the U.S. Government has participated in one of the greatest holocausts of human history, the Holocaust of African Enslavement. It sanctioned with law and gun the genocidal

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[to] operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society" (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967, quoted in Pinkney: 64).

<sup>33</sup> The Black Panther Party could be considered a revolutionary black nationalist group. As Pinkney notes, Huey Newton, who along with Bobby Seale founded the Black Panthers in 1966, "viewed the party as the successor to Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity" (p. 98). They differed from cultural nationalists, especially with regard to race (Seale equated cultural nationalism with black racism), viewing them as reactionary and an obstacle to black liberation. "They were so engrossed in this cultural nationalism, they just hated white people simply for the color of their skin," said Seale, explaining his decision to drop out of the Afro-American Association he had joined as a college student (Seale 1970, quoted in Pinkney: 123). "The cultural nationalist seeks refuge by retreating to some ancient African behavior and culture, and he refused to take into consideration those forces that are acting both on his own group and on the world as a whole ... We [the Black Panthers] feel no need to retreat to the past, although we respect our African heritage," wrote Newton in 1969 (quoted in Pinkney: 123). Linda Harrison, of the East Oakland, California branch of the Black Panther Party summed up their opinion of this rival ideology: "Cultural nationalism manifests itself in many ways but all of these manifestations are essentially grounded in one fact; a universal denial and ignoring of the present political, social, and economic realities and the concentration on the past as a frame of reference ... And cultural nationalism is most always based on racism. We hear 'Hate Whitey' and 'Kill the Honkey'" (1969, quoted in Pinkney: 124).

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process that destroyed millions of human lives, human culture, and the human possibility inherent in African life and culture. It has yet to acknowledge this horrific destruction or to take steps to make amends for it.

Moreover, even after the Holocaust, racist suppression continued, destroying lives, communities and possibilities. And even now, members of the government are pushing the country in a regressive rightwing direction, reversing hard won gains, blaming the victims, punishing the vulnerable and pandering to the worst of human emotions.

We thus call on the government of the United States to atone for the historical and current wrongs it has committed against African people and other people of color ... the government must:

publicly admit its role and role of the country in the Holocaust; publicly apologize for it;

publicly recognize its moral meaning to us and humanity through establishing institutions and educational processes which preserve memory of it, teach the lessons and horror of its history and stress the dangers and destructiveness of denying human dignity and human freedom; pay reparations; and

discontinue any and all practices which continue its effects or threaten its repetition.

We call on the government to also atone for its role in criminalizing a whole people, for its policies of destroying, discrediting, disrupting and otherwise neutralizing Black leadership, for spending more money on imprisonment than education, and on weapons of war than social development, for dismantling regulations that restrained corporations in their degradation of the environment and failing to check a deadly environmental racism that encourages placement of toxic waste in communities of color. And of course, we call for a halt to all of this.

Furthermore, we call on the government to stop undoing hard won gains such as affirmative action, voting rights and districting favorable to maximum Black political participation; to provide universal, full and affordable health care; to provide and support programs for affordable housing; to pass the Conyers Reparations Bill; to repeal the Omnibus Crime Bill; to halt disinvestment in social development and stop penalizing the urban and welfare poor and using them as scapegoats; to adopt an economic bill of rights including a plan to rebuild the wasting cities; to craft and institute policies to preserve and protect the environment; and to halt the privatization of public wealth, space and responsibility (1995: 7-9).<sup>34</sup>

Farrakhan's lack of revolutionary vision emerges when he is pressed to explain how life will change when and if the U.S. Government capitulates to his demand for territory. There are vague plans for black farmers to work the land, create processing plants and factories, utilize black-organized channels of distribution to transport products to black supermarkets for purchase by black consumers who will continue to reside where they currently reside (Gates, 1996: 151). It seems that economic growth, and adherence to a code of behavior that equates nation-building with marriage (discussed below) will solve all problems—no structural changes—just black men getting in on the white man's action. Indeed, it is deviance from strict morals that has caused problems in the U.S., according to Farrakhan. He believes that economic problems are "serious," but they flow out of a basic immorality ... " (Arizona Republic, 1996: 4).

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<sup>34</sup> The Conyers Bill, introduced into the House of Representatives in Feb., 1995, is known as H.R. 891—Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans, and would investigate the impact of slavery in the U.S. between 1619 and 1865 and make recommendations for "appropriate remedies." The 1994 Federal Crime Bill, is a striking example of racist/classist sentencing in the U.S. For example, under the bill, first-time possession of more than 5 grams of crack is punishable with five years in jail, while an equal amount of powder cocaine garner no jail time (Caravan, 1995).

Bell Hooks criticizes what is clearly a conservative nationalism: "When people focus on the white mass media's obsession with Louis Farrakhan, they think the media hate Farrakhan so much. But they don't hate Farrakhan. They love him. One of the reasons why they love him is that he's totally pro-capitalist. Farrakhan's pro-capitalism encourages a kind of false consciousness in Black life" (Third World Viewpoint, 1995: 2).

Despite the nationalist/separatist agenda and the demand for reparations from the U.S. Government, a certain "patriotism" emerges from Farrakhan's words. For example, in an interview last year, he explained that, "The economic leaders, who have benefited so much from this country, have no sense of patriotism. Patriotism is not part of corporate America's modus operandi. When you think more of a dollar and how you can make your bottom line fatter at the expense of the very nation that gave you a chance to become rich and powerful, then we have some serious, serious problems that have to be addressed" (Arizona Republic, 1996: 4). As well, Farrakhan often proclaims that "America is the greatest nation on earth and the greatest nation in the last 6,000 years" (see for example, Farrakhan, 1996a: 1).<sup>35</sup> In his view, the U.S. is still a "superpower" unrivaled throughout the world (Arizona Republic: 3)

### **Ideal Vision of Gender Relations**

While the NOI's request for "justice," "freedom," "equality of opportunity," and an independent territory seem to mimic the demands of the despised slaveowning "Founding Fathers of the United States," there are also very specific demands regarding women—they are singled out for "respect" and "protection" (NOI, "The Muslim Program": 3). The construction of strict gender roles within their community is spelled out clearly in a number of NOI documents.

In the ideology of the NOI men are clearly superior to women. "Allah says in the Qur'an that men are a degree above women," Farrakhan explains. "Now, that may hurt feminists. I don't want to hurt your feelings. We're not a degree above you in our condition now, we're several degrees below you. But in the nature in which God created you, brother, he created you a degree above the woman. Otherwise the woman would not be able to look up to you. Anytime you have a woman that does not look up to you, brother, you're in trouble" (1996: 3).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Perhaps this is out of deference to an audience he acknowledges includes many ex-servicemen, Cold-War warriors (for example, Farrakhan, 1996a: 3). It is interesting to note that item #10 of the NOI's "What the Muslims must Believe" states that members should not be forced to take part in wars that take human lives because "we have nothing to gain from it unless America agrees to give us the necessary territory where in many have something to fight for" (NOI, "The Muslim Program": 3).

<sup>36</sup> Farrakhan, in his MMM speech, where the three basic themes were "atonement, reconciliation and responsibility," reiterated the notion that it is the duty of men to lead: "Our priority call to Black men to stand up and assume this new and expanded sense of responsibility is based on the realization that the strength and resourcefulness of the family and the liberation of the people require it; as some of the most acute problems facing the Black community within are those posed by Black males who have not stood up; that the caring and responsible father in the home; the responsible and future-focused male youth; security in and of the community, the quality of male/female relations, and the family's capacity to avoid poverty and push the lives of its members forward all depend on Black men's standing up ... " (Million Man March Mission Statement, 1995: 2).

37. That women are sacred wombs implies to me that access to birth control and abortion would be constricted within NOI ideology. I have not found specific references to these issues in the current NOI documents, though there are references to prohibitions in the past. Ross, citing a 1977 report by Littlewood, reports that in the 1960s when abortion was still illegal "several birth control clinics were invaded by Black Muslims associated with The Nation of Islam, who published cartoons in Muhammad Speaks that depicted bottles of birth control pills marked with skull and crossbones, or graves of unborn Black infants" (1993: 153). During the '60s groups like Urban League and NAACP were against family planning and saw reproduction as a way to gain power,

The essential nature of women reveals the very superiority of men, according to Farrakhan, and attempts by women to challenge nature—by positioning themselves as leaders or by deviating from the role that they should realize best suits them—will backfire. They will create problems for themselves, such as domestic violence. In a sense “difficult” women get what they deserve in Farrakhan’s view—though they might be victims of abuse, the abuse is justified by their deviance. In a document specifically addressing the high incidence of domestic violence, Farrakhan clarifies his position:

I want to help you, sisters, understand what you can do for this male who desperately, wants to become a man and has all the potential to be a great man. Your problem, sisters, is you really don’t know how to handle today’s Black man.

What is the demand of nature in the man for you (woman), and what is the demand in the nature of the woman for the man? The Qur’an teaches, ‘Men are the maintainers of women ... ’ ... That is a very weighty statement.

Women today say, ‘I don’t need a man to maintain me. I’ll maintain myself.’ These are very independent sisters today. ... But, when we start getting away from the nature in which God created us, we start getting into problems (Farrakhan, 1996d: 2-3).

In the NOI, a woman’s value is derived by her reproductive capacity, which makes her sacred. “ ... Through her we are extended through the generations,” explains Farrakhan (1996b, 1). Women are simply the wombs which serve as the incubators and conduit for the legacy of men:

The Holy Qur’an teaches us that both male and female have the same essence or come from the essence or being that is Allah, the All Wise God. He has given both male and female complimentary natures which, if acted on properly help each mate to attain to fulfilment, perfect peace, and full development or perfection.

The disrespect of women is the reason that the ... world is in the condition that it is in ... She is the cornerstone of the family and therefore is critical in the whole process of nation and world building ... Allah (God) speaks to us saying that, we should reverence the womb that bore us ... Since, the womb of our mother is sacred, then, this teaches us that the womb of every female is also sacred, for it is from her womb that all the Scientists, Prophets, Sages, Messengers, Kings, Rulers and Gods have come and will come. (Farrakhan, 1996b: 1).<sup>37</sup>

“...Premarital sex is forbidden,” writes Farrakhan (1996b: 2). But the sex act is acknowledged as being a natural drive: “Sex is powerful. It is a natural hunger in the male and the female even as the desire for food and water” but it is only sanctioned within marriage—it cannot provide the basis

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writes Ross, adding that some cultural nationalist also equated birth control with genocide: “The Black Power conference ... in 1967, organized by Amiri Baraka, passed an anti-birth control resolution.” Only the Black Panthers supported “free abortions and contraceptives on demand” (Ward, 1986, cited in Ross: 153) though this was not accepted by all factions within the group.

<sup>37</sup> That women are sacred wombs implies to me that access to birth control and abortion would be constricted within NOI ideology. I have not found specific references to these issues in the current NOI documents, though there are references to prohibitions in the past. Ross, citing a 1977 report by Littlewood, reports that in the 1960s when abortion was still illegal “several birth control clinics were invaded by Black Muslims associated with The Nation of Islam, who published cartoons in Muhammad Speaks that depicted bottles of birth control pills marked with skull and crossbones, or graves of unborn Black infants” (1993: 153). During the ‘60s groups like Urban League and NAACP were against family planning and saw reproduction as a way to gain power, writes Ross, adding that some cultural nationalist also equated birth control with genocide: “The Black Power conference ... in 1967, organized by Amiri Baraka, passed an anti-birth control resolution.” Only the Black Panthers supported “free abortions and contraceptives on demand” (Ward, 1986, cited in Ross: 153) though this was not accepted by all factions within the group.

for a lasting marriage. "Courtship is chaperoned" to prevent premarital sex and the U.S. government financed schools that Farrakhan calls for are to be segregated by gender. Both precautions are meant to encourage sound, spiritual decision-making when it comes time to marry (1996b: 3).<sup>38</sup> Again, women who do not heed these recommendations, bring problems upon themselves:

How many women see themselves and their wombs as sacred? If the womb is sacred then the passageway through which the seed of life enters the womb is also sacred ... That which is sacred must be safe and not violated. Women all over the earth, due to an improper view of self have violated themselves and allowed men and society to violate them. (emphasis added, Farrakhan, 1996b: 2).

Echoing Garvey's rhetoric, NOI guidelines declare "We believe that intermarriage or race mixing should be prohibited" (NOI, "The Muslim Program": 2). Due to their reproductive role, women mark the boundaries of the community. As NOI identity markers, women are to be protected and fought over because to gain access to the women is to penetrate the boundaries of the community, to take control of the channel through which the new generations of "believers" will be brought forth. As Farrakhan explains:

A man should die before he lets a stranger contaminate his woman. A man should kill. We ought to be the number one killers on the earth to keep any man away from our woman. A man is not worth anything if he will not protect the woman that gives birth to his own nation.

When a white man comes into our society, he goes to war with that society so that he may have free access to the woman. He has conquered us as men, and therefore we cannot be to our women what God commanded us to be until we are made free of the mind and the power of our enemies that control and dominate our thinking. (Farrakhan, 1996d: 4).

The building blocks of the NOI are a patriarchal family. "It is written in the Holy Qur'an that Allah (God) hates divorce," explains Farrakhan (1996c: 1). "Divorce goes against the very basic unit of civilization, for divorce breaks up the family. Where there is no strong family, there is no strong community or nation." Farrakhan accuses those who reject these ideals of being traitors to the nation. Obviously, there is no room for homosexuality within the NOI. Says Farrakhan: "... we don't chase women, we won't chase men" (emphasis added, 1996e: 2).

A woman seems to have very little opportunity for self-determination within this essentialized, biologically-oriented construct—things are done for her, "A man's duty to the woman is to preserve, protect and upkeep her and to keep her in the specified state that God has made her," Farrakhan here objectifies women to the point where they sound like little more than automobiles in need of regular tune-ups and oil-changes (1996: 4).

### **Sharing Space with the NOI**

Without question, the most visible critics of the NOI until now have been those who call into question the anti-Semitism that Farrakhan has espoused. This aspect of NOI ideology has not been discussed in this paper, not because I find it unimportant, but because I think this has already been covered by many others. To summarize briefly: critics focus on Farrakhan's statement that "Hitler was a great man" that Judaism is a "dirty religion," that international decision-making is controlled by a "cabal" of Jews, and the NOI publication of the incendiary text *The Secret Relationship between Blacks and Jews*. In response, Farrakhan says he is misunderstood and misquoted. Recently, he claimed Jewish ancestry (Gates, 1996: 143).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "We want equal education—but separate schools up to 16 for boys and 18 for girls on the condition that the girls be sent to women's colleges and universities," states item #9 of "What the Muslims Want" (NOI, "The Muslim Program": 2).

<sup>39</sup> For more on this controversy, from the perspective of the NOI, see the three-part series "Racism and the Anti-Farrakhan Jewish Rage," available at the NOI website. Also available online from the

Much has also been written by whites in response to the "white devil" rhetoric of some black nationalist movements. Indeed, blacks who still favor an integrationist strategy have also challenged the separatist aspect of NOI ideology. But very little has been written about the patriarchal nature of gender relations championed by Farrakhan and his followers. Why?

U.S. politicians in general have placed the blame for social and economic problems on the breakdown of patriarchal families. Woefully contrasting the "good-ole days" with the contemporary lack of interest in so-called "traditional family values" is a familiar refrain mouthed by politicians—Republican, Democratic, black, white, male and female alike. Witness, for example, the debate that prefaced the passage of the August 1996 welfare "reform" legislation.<sup>40</sup> This discourse constructed (and officially legislated) the ideal woman in the U.S. as heterosexual, married, virgin until marriage and marginalized and economically damned if she demonstrates deviance. Farrakhan's ideology is based on gendered norms of behavior largely in sync with what could be termed the dominant white capitalist ideology in the U.S. (or at the very least in sync with its embodied representatives who fill the Congress and White House).

Though the gendered aspect of Farrakhan's message meets with U.S. government approval, how much resonance does such a message, which champions such gender roles, have within black communities? Is deviance from a subservient role as dutiful wife and mother perceived as a problem or a strength? Is it tolerable or unacceptable behavior for a black woman living in the context of the U.S. in the 1990s? Social and economic indicators don't tell the complete story of the experience of black people in the U.S., but can offer an overview of the context into which a cry for male-headed households and stay-at-home moms is being issued.

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NOI is "Farrakhan and the Jewish Rift: How it all Started," (1994) four-page document. For an analysis of the state of Black/Jewish relations in the U.S. see *Jews and Blacks: Let the Healing Begin* by Cornel West and Michael Lerner (Plume, 1996), Hooks (1995a) and Eisenstein (1996).

<sup>40</sup> On August 22, 1996 U.S. President Bill Clinton signed into the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Conciliation Act, which amends the food stamp program and abolishes AFDC. The "reform" calls for abstinence education, requires single teenage-mothers seeking assistance to live in adult-supervised households, requires paternity information from single mothers seeking assistance, and denies most benefits to immigrants (legal and illegal). The bill also sets lifetime limits on benefits and requires some recipients to "work off" benefits doing unpaid labor. The stated goals of the legislation were "preventing and reducing out-of wedlock pregnancies" and encouraging the formulation and maintenance of two-parent families" (H.R. 3734, Sec. 103, Title 1: Block Grants for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).

Historically, the issue of economic assistance to women has been shaped by stereotypical assumptions about the sexuality of the poor and a "pathology" of the "underclass." Welfare recipients have been characterized as lazy women with uncontrollable sexual appetites, undereducated, who breed on in an attempt to receive more and more benefits—criminals out to take advantage of hard-working taxpayers. But it is racism that has played perhaps the largest role in this debate. Reagan's infamous "welfare queen" was no doubt visualized by many to be a loud-talking fat black woman with a brood of babies.

In 1965, as Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan authored a now infamous report in which he sought to explain rising dependency on AFDC benefits among black women despite decreasing unemployment among black men. He concluded that the dominance of wives over husbands caused the break-up of black families—men were devalued, in Moynihan's eyes, and it was matriarchy that was responsible for black poverty. AFDC was functioning as a subsidy for broken families and facilitating a gender role reversal in the black community, he believed (Peterson and Brown, 1994: 96-98). In reality, the welfare recipients of the 1990s are mostly children (in 1994, of the 14.2 million people on welfare, 9.6 million were children) and women who were fleeing domestic violence (82% of women receiving some form of assistance had experienced "severe physical or sexual assault") (1996 Green Book, U.S. Ways and Means Committee, p. 2: NOW (1996) Legislative Update, Sept. 13, p. 5).



Though only 13% of the total population in the U.S. is categorized as "black", black men make up 43% of the prison population, 37% of AFDC recipients in 1994 were black (Hansby, 1996: 6; Bilens, 1996: 602). In 1993 more than 58% of black households were headed by women, in 1991 68% of births took place outside of marriage (Hacker, 1995: 102). Single mothers are alternatively portrayed as the saviors or the downfall of black communities. Some politicians, with newspaper op-ed writers sounding off approvingly, call for the deployment of court-ordered birth control (Norplant) as a weapon to fight black poverty and crime (Hartmann, 1995: 211, Yuval-Davis, 1996: 20).

Because of Affirmative Action policies created to remedy sexist and racist hiring practices by stipulating hiring quotas for blacks and women, some black men have suggested that black women have benefited more, by fulfilling two categories at once, at the expense of black men (Washington, 1995: 153). Hooks notes that this ignores "the reality that this acceptance (when it occurs) is rooted in the assumption that black females can be more easily subordinated and subjugated than their black male counterparts ... for years conservative black males have insisted that the black female's proximity to whiteness is always an advantage. They refuse to look at the ways this closeness has resulted in exploitation and abuse" (1995b: 96).

Meanwhile, the strength of black women in the face of racial oppression and their ability to navigate a path through daily life (to "bargain with patriarchy" as Kandiyoti would say) has been turned around by some to be the very cause of problems for black men.

"Two major traditional masculine roles are providing for and protecting the members of their households. The double-digit unemployment rates of black males for most of the last two decades reflect the special difficulties black men face in serving as both providers and protectors. Deprived of these roles, black males have frequently behaved in asocial, if not pathological, ways. The feminist movement's effort to redefine male roles has hardly alleviated this problem, or the issue of powerlessness among black men; indeed, it has confused, stultified, and alienated them" writes Kenneth Tollett, Sr., lawyer and Distinguished Professor of Higher Education at Howard University (1995: 165).<sup>41</sup> The "key to the reconstruction of the black family, and the socio-economic re-integration of the black community" in his view is to "achieve full employment for black males."

As Rita Williams notes, "It's an American tradition to blame Mom for everything from athlete's foot to impotence, but the perpetual focus on the overbearing black female obscures the profound trauma both daughters and sons experience concerning Dad" (1995: 133). Hooks agrees: "Many black males and even some black females believe the crisis would be resolved if black women would simply accept to subordinate status irrespective of whether black males worked or not" (1995a: 66).

Feminism in general, continues to be loudly derided by a significant contingent of black male intellectuals in the United States: Take for example the sentiments of writer Ishmael Reed, professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley, who scoffs at feminists in academia:

it's decadent for some black feminists who are rolling in handsome academic salaries and extravagant honorariums to complain about their double oppression while thousands of black, white, brown, and yellow women and their children panhandle in the streets all over the United States. What have the Black Divas who barter their double oppression and who make enormous honorariums on the lecture and reading circuit done for these women? What has the feminist movement done for poor women at all? ... I suspect that gender relationships are not as big an

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<sup>41</sup> Howard University, founded in 1867 and located in Washington, D.C., is a prestigious "historically black" university that, according to its promotional information, boasts of "producing more African Americans with advanced degrees than any other institution in the world."

issue among ordinary blacks as they are among college people, because on the street level black men and women realize that both genders are catching hell (Reed 1995: 119).<sup>42</sup>

Nathan Hare, head of The Black Think Tank and founder of The Black Scholar, which he edited from 1969-1975, is of the opinion that "black feminists have not contributed one major original idea to feminism other than the predictable reports that white feminists are 'racists' too" (1995: 126). White feminists meanwhile, are, in his view, responsible for bringing "down every black male effort to rise" including "The Nation of Islam's current effort to hold black males-only meetings as well as black females-only meetings" (1995: 128).

Historically, the black liberation movement in the U.S. has been dominated by men who have not considered the gendered aspect of oppression. "Black men did not see themselves as oppressors of their women but as the victims of white America," writes Elsie Washington (1995: 154). "For the most part, they berated the Women's Lib Movement as an activity of spoiled white women," writes Washington. She notes that:

In Martin Luther King, Jr's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, in the NAACP, the Urban League, and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), black men held the leadership positions that set policy and decided on strategy. The feeling of black men, and some black women, within and outside the organizations was that it was important for men to be in the forefront, to assert themselves as leaders in a manner that emulated the larger, white society. A lot of black men in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements considered that women were 'rewards' for soldiers 'on the front lines' and that women existed to have sex and to perform domestic duties. A popular saying, attributed to Stokely Carmichael (now Kwame Toure) to the effect that 'the best position for women [in the struggle] is prone,' is a ready example (1995: 151).

Embracing feminist ideology, a "white" ideology, therefore is akin to being a race traitor. Take for example Tollet, who sees feminists as responsible for undoing the accomplishments of black men. Intellectuals (black and white), says Tollet, are "under the undue influence of feminists" and cites such examples of this negative impact as the Thomas-Hill hearings, as well as the ouster of Chavis from the NAACP (see note #3). " ... Many black women have bolstered their positions by identifying with feminism, constructing Sisterhood against both black and white males," writes Tollet (1995: 166). "Furthermore, some progressive black writers show signs of submergence in the white world of radical gynocentrism or feminism. Feminist adherents frequently and ritualistically bash males, pandering to female jingoist interests" (1995: 167-168).

On the allure of heterosexist norms, such as those the NOI would see strengthened, Hooks notes that: "The rhetoric of nationalism is totally homophobic, and to the degree that contemporary Black people are engaged in escapist, non-political, non-revolutionary fantasies of nationalism and the patriarchal family, we are more aggressively homophobic than the larger culture where there are a lot of white liberals and leftists who are not interested in nationalism" (Third World Viewpoint, 1995: 5).

Indeed, Hooks also points to the confirmation hearings of black Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, in which he defended himself against a black female colleague's accusations of sexual harassment, as a revealing episode:

It is the intense collective sexism of African American men and women that has relegated the gender crisis in black relations to the status of an unimportant agenda—until white patriarchy turned the spotlight on the issue. Suddenly, the Thomas hearings motivated masses of black men (and some women) who daily turn a deaf ear to gender issues to enter the discussion ... They came armed with the rhetoric of an anti-feminist backlash, without even taking the time to study and consider either the destructive impact of patriarchal thinking in black life or to contemplate

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<sup>42</sup> Reed also takes some black feminists to task for their "anti-miscegenetic attitudes" as witnessed by him at a conference on gender issues, specifically noting their "ugly and tasteless" comments and "smirking" regarding Clarence Thomas' marriage to a white woman (1995: 120).

whether or not conversion to feminist politics might be a constructive way to address this crisis" (1995b: 93).

What emerges is a perception that the plight of black men is more deserving of attention than that of black women. " ... There is an almost fascistic insistence in the African community to put aside one's process of individualization for the supposed good of the race. This is particularly true for many women," writes Williams (1995: 1995: 133). Hooks characterizes this as "an endless, meaningless debate about who has suffered more" (1995b: 98).

According to Derrick Bell, a prominent New York University law professor, "feminist critiques of 'power relations' must first confront the continuing powerlessness of black males" (cited in Tollet, emphasis added, 1995: 168).

The prioritizing of male struggles over female, in the hierarchy of concerns, coincides with Farrakhan's view that men lead and maintain women and that powerful women, who deviate from a subservient role, create problems instead of viable alternatives that lead to solutions.

### **Conclusion**

Given an environment which denigrates the strategies of black women to survive and succeed, instead suggesting that if given the chance, men could "do it better," it seems surprising that the patriarchal component of the NOI's message has not been widely attacked, beyond recognition that the Million Man March was a male-centered event. Ignoring the link between the NOI and other patriarchal groups, and placing Farrakhan's rhetoric completely in the realm of radical outsider views that challenge the current social order is a mistake. Perhaps this occurs because the NOI draws its members from within a minority population, currently with limited political influence, whereas the conservative Christian Right, for example, is dominated by whites mainlined into the already established (majority) power structures. In fact, there are striking similarities between the white Christian Right, frequently labelled a fundamentalist movement, and the NOI. The question remains—can we consider the NOI a fundamentalist group? I believe the answer is yes.

"Fundamentalist movements, all over the world, are basically political movements which have a religious imperative and seek in various ways, in widely differing circumstances, to harness modern state and media powers to the service of their gospel," explain Sahgal and Yuval-Davis (1992: 4). "This gospel is presented as the only valid form of religion. It can rely heavily on sacred religious texts, but it can also be more experiential and linked to specific charismatic leadership ... It can appear as a form of orthodoxy—a maintenance of 'traditional values'—or as a revivalist radical phenomenon, dismissing impure and corrupt forms of religion to 'return to original sources,'" Sahgal and Yuval-Davis note that such movements have "often been incorporated into and transformed nationalist movements" (1992: 2).

As I have demonstrated, the NOI message is nationalist and constructs a "traditional past" firmly based on a control of women's sexuality in the guise of religious gospel. This gospel, spouted from the mouth of a charismatic leader, is offered up as the remedy for a deteriorating society. For example, the NOI emphasizes that "We know that the above plan for the solution of the black and white conflict is the best and only answer to the problem between people" (emphasis added, NOI, "The Muslim Program," p. 1). "Scientists," more modern players than traditional, are linked by Farrakhan to the introduction of a corrupt race of oppressors and the upcoming apocalypse.

Farrakhan says that "the greatest single thing that I would hope to see in America is that religious leaders would begin to teach and stress the moral values that make a nation perpetually great, and stop compromising that of HIS prophets by what we'd call modernism or humanism, that makes us compromise the very values that make the nation great" (Arizona Republic, 1996: 3). Attacks on

humanism, which is equated with secularism, and modernity are staples of right-wing Christian attacks on the "godlessness" and "moral decay" of contemporary society in the U.S.<sup>43</sup>

When similarities are noted between Farrakhan and leaders of the Christian Right, he does not discourage this. "They've done a lot of comparing me with Pat Buchanan. Pat Buchanan is a very honest person ... He speaks with passion because he's concerned about the future of this country. Whether you agree with him or not—that's entirely the people's choice—we need more people speaking forthrightly for the things and against those things that are absolutely destroying this nation" (Arizona Republic, 1996: 4).

The use of the terms "fundamentalism" has been challenged by scholars who say it is a misappropriated Protestant term turned "polemical" "representing an essentialized anti-modernism" resulting in a faulty analytical and political term which should be avoided; instead "differentiated and culturally specific terms" should be employed (Nederveen-Pieterse, 1994: 2-6). While I agree that placing concepts in context is necessary (if not mandatory) for them to retain their usefulness, I disagree with those who would throw such a term out the window. As Sahgal and Yuval-Davis (1994: 8) note there is a common ground in discourses within fundamentalist movements. To ignore these commonalities, I believe is short-sighted.

Similarly, the term "patriarchy," used by feminists since the 1960s "to refer to the systematic organization of male supremacy and female subordination" has not been used in a "unified" way, even by feminists (Stacey, 1993: 53). The patriarchy debate is ongoing: Feminists continue to doubt the usefulness of a terms that has such different meanings in different contexts, others, such as Mies (1986, cited in Stacey, 1993: 53) note that there is value in having a catch-all concept for the systematic oppression of women. It is certainly easier to rally round.

Sahgal and Yuval-Davis arrive at a similar conclusion in their defense of the term fundamentalism. "Politically, it is very important for WAF [Women Against Fundamentalism] to use a term which is not specific to one movement such as Islam, because this would support a more narrow and confined reading—a racist usage of the term (although, this does not prevent us from using specific terms when referring to specific movements)," they write, adding that the ability to recognize a phenomena that has resonance with women who have different lived experiences is very valuable. "This sense of common experience is fundamental for political mobilizing and creates links across religious and cultural specifics. As it does not deny difference in context and circumstances ... Yes, divergency is important; so is coalition politics" (1994: 9).

While many men, outside the NOI, also believe that a strategy of increasing the percentage of male-breadwinner families will solve most problems, Hooks for example, presents a very different view of the "reality" of black women in contemporary society: "Most black females have not been socialized to be 'women' in the traditional sexist sense—that is, to be weak and/or subordinate. Had we been socialized this way historically, most black communities and families would not have survived" (1995a: 70). "It would be liberatory both to black males and females for us to rethink whether appropriation of conventional sexist norms has advanced black life. To expect black men to act as 'protectors' and 'providers' as a way of earning the status of patriarch seems ludicrous given the economy, the shift in gender roles, the inability of many black males to provide either economically or emotionally for themselves, and their inability to protect themselves against life-threatening white supremacist capitalist patriarchal assault, with which they are all too often complicit—for example, black on black homicide."

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<sup>43</sup> Specifically, these charges are often made in the context of education. For more on the Christian right and their efforts to censor classroom materials that they perceive to be inappropriate, see for example: People for the American Way (1996) "Teaching Fear. The Religious Right's Campaign against Sexuality Education," 18-page document; NARAL (1996) "The Right Wing in the Classroom: The Rise of Fear-Based Sexuality Education," four page document; and Nation Alert (1994) "Censorship, Education, and the Religious Right," Oct., vol. 1, no. 8, five-page document—all are available via the Internet.

We must recognize that the discourse of the NOI helps to advance an agenda that is being foisted on all women in the U.S., not just members of this black Muslim group. By placing the blame for suffering on strong, independent women who deviate from a patriarchal gender role, and by calling for their replacement with women who fit a subservient, dependent "ideal" the NOI works in concert with those of all ethnicities who seek to strengthen sexist patriarchal norms in the U.S. and beyond. This cedes the dialogue regarding race relations to a men's-club of decision-makers.

Just as the black nationalist movement led by Marcus Garvey, which called for racial separatism and "purity" was able to "come to an understanding" with the Ku Klux Klan and other white racist groups in the 1930s (Pinkney, 1976: 48), so too does the NOI's ideology provide support for contemporary white racist, sexist, homophobic Christian groups. The NOI says "We believe this is the time in history for the separation of the so-called Negroes and the so-called white Americans" (The Muslim Program": 2). White supremacist groups, such as Aryan Nation, have agreed. As Sahgal and Yuval-Davis note, "just because a political movement has the 'right enemy', that does not automatically transform it into a 'goody'" (1992: 6).

"Black Islamic fundamentalism shares with the white Christian Right support for coercive hierarchy, fascism, and a belief that some groups are inferior and others superior, along with a host of other similarities. Irrespective of the standpoint, religious fundamentalism brainwashes individuals to not think critically or see radical politicization as a means of transforming their lives. When people of color immerse themselves in religious fundamentalism, no meaningful challenge and critique of white supremacy can surface. Participation in a radical multiculturalism in any form is discouraged by religious fundamentalism," writes Hooks (1995a: 203).

"When Farrakhan pits black against Jew, or when Jews become fixated on black anti-Semitism, they deny their shared otherness in order to draw boundary markers that let them feel safer, they imagine themselves in control," writes Zillah Eisenstein (1996: 27).

In this case, I agree with Hooks, that a quest for territory seems a "utopian fantasy." It seems a panacea that takes attention away from the difficult and complex issues that need to be dealt with. "... Many of our African nations have failed precisely because they lacked a revolutionary vision for social changes that worked, and not because they didn't have a nation," Hooks notes. "So, Black Americans must be very very cautious in embracing the notion of a nation as the redemptive location. The redemptive location lies in our radical politics and the strategies by which we implement those radical politics—not with the formation of a nation" (Third World Viewpoint, 1995:5). Additionally Hooks observes that Afrocentrism is no remedy to Eurocentrism, and nationalism based on a generalized "African" identity essentializes black life just as Eurocentrist notions create a streamlined view of what white lived-experiences are (1995a: 243).

Pull-yourself-up-by the bootstraps and self-help through strong morals echoes mainstream prescriptions to achieve a stronger, more competitive United States. Certainly it is indistinguishable from right-wing pundits who led the charge in the recent demolition of U.S. federal programs that provide assistance to single mothers. The NOI's emphasis on "traditional" gender roles which favor two-parent families headed by a male "breadwinner" and managed by a woman who fulfills the duties of faithful wife and devoted mother echo the predominantly white Christian right "traditional family values" agenda which has proved to be very influential in the political arena of the 90s.

"It should be more than clear if not from black life then from the experiences of white folks, documented in feminist writings, that the patriarchal family presents no model for liberation," notes Hooks (1995a: 71).

NOI-style gender roles constrain the ability of women to exercise agency. Such a "liberation" strategy, that calls on women to take a backseat to other decision-makers and acquiesce to a life spent in the domestic sphere, seems doomed to failure if real change is the true goal. In addition to the other shortcomings of NOI ideology, as preached by Minister Louis Farrakhan, I believe this aspect must be considered if a true evaluation of their message is to take place.

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