

CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

FACING THE NATION

**“A THEO-PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION OF MEDIA AND ACADEMIC
VIOLENCE TOWARDS THE NATION OF ISLAM AND THE (RE)VEILING OF
THE NATION’S LEVINASIAN FACE”**

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To my loving mother (Lorena Doxy), my grandmother (Thelma Chandler) and my entire family.

Thank you all for ensuring that I did not abandon this journey.

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ABSTRACT

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Title: A Theo-Philosophical Examination of Media and Academic Violence Towards the Nation of Islam and the (Re)Veiling of the Nation's Levinasian Face

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This dissertation examines particular forms of violence toward the Nation of Islam in popular media and academic literature from 1930 to 1996. Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach, this project engages a philosophical examination of the same's, that is, the dominant society's, allergic response to the alterity perceived within the Nation of Islam. Taking Emmanuel Levinas's metaphysical reappropriation of ontology and ethics seriously, this work demonstrates that the Levinasian face of the Nation has been the intended target of this violence.

Furthermore, this work argues that the radical alterity that authentically belongs to the Nation has been the casualty of monstrosification, understood here as the intentional disfigurement, veiling, reconstruction, enervation, and absencing of the other's Levinasian face. It traces the methodological precursors of this violence within an ontologically centered tradition and calls for a pre-methodological response that disarms the violent machinery of the dominant society and facilitates direct encounters with religious others, such as the Nation of Islam.

The pathway beyond the violent tropes and categorizations leveled against the Nation calls for discursive hospitality and welcome within an inhospitable American context. It is here that the Levinasian face-to-face encounter becomes a critical injunction of justice,

one that reduces harm and allows the Nation to speak the impossible story concealed beneath violent and muting tropes. Underneath the veil of monstrosification, the Nation speaks a restless love story. This command to preserve the other's life allows the Nation's Levinasian face to unveil its disruptive alterity, which is rooted in an impossible story—an impossible love story.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: ENCOUNTERING THE NATION

The Nation of Islam¹ may very well be considered one of the most controversial religious movements in America. Often presented as a quasi-Islamic religious cult, a Black nationalist movement, a separatist organization, or a dangerous site of racial and religious deviance, the Nation has been shrouded in as much mystery as controversy. Part of the difficulty is that the Nation of Islam does not fit neatly into the established categories of religious acceptability, nor does it easily correspond to the disciplinary coordinates often used to examine it. It is sociological, political, economic, theological, philosophical, and religious, but it is never reducible to any one of these categories.

This dissertation begins from the claim that the difficulty of the Nation of Islam is not merely a problem of classification. It is a problem of encounter. The Nation appears as an other, a religious other, and a fascinating interreligious other that has captivated both the public and the academy. Yet the dominant modes of encountering the Nation have often proceeded by reducing, framing, veiling, and distorting it before it is allowed to speak on its own behalf. The problem, then, is not simply that the Nation has been misunderstood. The deeper problem is that many of the media and academic representations of the Nation have helped make authentic encounter nearly impossible.

From its inception, the Nation has represented a stark disruption to the socio-political and religious order. It has resisted and disrupted, but it has also cooperated, unified, disciplined, and transformed. Its relation to the larger society has been

¹ Fard Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom Lessons* (Chicago: The Final Call, 1995), 26. The Nation of Islam is technically known as The Lost-Found Nation of Islam. It will be referred to as “The Nation,” “The NOI,” and “NOI” throughout this work.

conditioned by its alterity, especially in the ways it has been encountered, presented, and perceived. Consequently, reducing the Nation to one category or another has proven inadequate for understanding the Nation, its theology, and its appeal to Black people in America. Even amid controversy, turbidity, discord, and distorted imagery, the Nation has produced stories that seem virtually impossible. Mine is such a story.

This dissertation argues that the Nation of Islam has not merely been misunderstood or misrepresented in popular media and academic literature; rather, it has been subjected to forms of epistemic, representational, and theo-philosophical violence that distort, veil, and attempt to neutralize its Levinasian face. By reading these acts of framing through Emmanuel Levinas's understanding of alterity, face, and ethical encounter, this project demonstrates that the dominant society's response to the Nation has often been an allergic response to religious otherness. The central concern of this work, then, is not simply what has been said about the Nation, but what those representations have concealed, foreclosed, and made nearly impossible: an authentic face-to-face encounter with the Nation as a religious other who speaks.

1.1 Encountering the Face of the Nation

The Nation of Islam was introduced to me in my junior year of high school. Mrs. Noble, my English teacher, who was notoriously known for including anti-cheating measures in her assessments, assigned the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*.² I did not want to face the consequences of taking any shortcuts, so I decided to actually read the book. Reading was not among my favorite pastimes, but from the moment I opened this book, I was immediately captivated. The book never left my side. I found myself producing

² Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992).

excuses not to hang out with my friends so that I could be further enthralled by the drama and the life unfolding on the pages before me. While I never experienced the vicissitudes of *street life*, there was something about Malcolm X's story that resonated with me.

Every chance I had, I buried my face in those pages, not coming up for air until I had far too many questions whirling around in my head to continue. At the conclusion of the book, I was completely heartbroken and considerably disoriented. "Is that it?" "Is that the end?" This was not enough. I needed more.

Obsession drove me to scrape up as much money as I could from any source available to me, and I visited nearly every bookstore in Chicago that carried Malcolm X's speeches. Challenging the limits of my wallet, I purchased as many recorded speeches as I could afford. My train rides to and from school were consumed with Malcolm's voice and thoughts. Everyone within my vicinity became inundated with questions that were sparked by Malcolm X: "As a Christian, is it biblically permissible for me to eat pork?" "What is this religion, Islam?" "What is the Qur'an, and is it different from the Bible?" "Who is Prophet Muhammad?" "Who is the Honorable Elijah Muhammad?" The varied responses I received to my inquiries led me to infer that Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam were topics that people knew little to nothing about. I encountered many misrepresentations that were ostensibly intended to dissuade me from this new journey.

One day, while sitting in my school's in-house suspension classroom, I saw my classmate, Abel,³ reading a book with the same focus and intensity that I had while reading the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. He had hardly noticed me as I stood over him, asking what was it that he was reading. He told me that he was reading *Message to the*

³ Abel is known as Abel Muhammad, the Nation of Islam Latino Minister.

Blackman by Elijah Muhammad.⁴ When I heard the name, my eyes immediately lit up. “That is him,” I thought to myself. He is the one mentioned in Malcolm X’s that I had so many questions about. Abel must have sensed my excitement because he ended up gifting me the book, and I graciously accepted. I took the book back to my desk, looking at the cover, studying the face on the cover, tracing the contours of Elijah Muhammad’s cheeks, and taking in the softness of his eyes. There was something familiar about this face. Then, I remembered where I had seen this face before. This was the same face that I had encountered on posters plastered throughout Roseland (on the south side of Chicago) in the early 1980’s. Actually, there were two faces on the posters. I would later learn of them both, but for the time being, I was satisfied with my intrigue with Elijah Muhammad’s face. When I read *Message to the Blackman*, I remembered having the sense that I had found what I had been searching for all of my life. This was certainly the advent of something captivating and wonderful, a story pretty much like Malcolm’s, one that has brought me to this point.

My story is not unique. There are tens of thousands of Black people who can relay similar experiences and encounters with Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad, and the Nation of Islam. These encounters matter because they reveal something often concealed by the dominant frames imposed upon the Nation. For many, the Nation was not first encountered as a sociological problem, a political threat, or a deviant religious formation. It was encountered as a voice, a face, a call, a challenge, and, in many cases, a source of discipline, dignity, and transformation.

⁴ Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman* (Chicago, IL: Muhammad’s Temple No. 2, 1965).

1.2 Alterity and the Levinasian Face

The problem is that these experiences become nearly unintelligible when the Nation is reduced to identifying categories and tropes that render direct, authentic, and intimate encounter impossible. At the very least, such reductions diminish the possibility of encountering the alterity that constitutes the Nation of Islam. They do not merely describe the Nation from a distance; they help construct the terms by which the Nation may be seen, heard, judged, dismissed, or feared.

What is at the root of the Nation's otherness or alterity? Will the Nation always subsist as an *other*? Is the Nation's alterity to be overcome? Should the Nation's alterity be neutralized? These questions bring to bear the nature of alterity, specifically as it relates to the NOI (or any religious *other* for that matter). Calling into service the Levinasian concept of the face, as it is explicated in *Totality and Infinity*, the basis of this alterity can be seen as being relational and not necessarily or primarily ontological. To what degree does the alterity of the NOI present a problem for those who study the Nation or encounter the Nation? To what degree does the alterity of the NOI present a problem for the NOI itself? If one were to attempt to pinpoint or locate the alterity of the Nation, where might one land, and what might one discover or uncover? On the surface, the Nation's alterity appears to be rooted in the Nation of Islam's organizational structure and nationalism, but this does not go to the heart of the matter. The alterity has to be allowed to exceed the limits of societal expectations and the imposed cognates of researchers. The Nation should always be allowed to signify beyond the recognized differences that condition the research and discourses about the Nation. Emmanuel Levinas succinctly explains the nature of this alterity:

But there is something which remains outside, and that is alterity. Alterity is not at all the fact that there is a difference, that facing me there is someone who has a different nose than mine, different colour eyes, another character. It is not difference, but alterity. It is alterity, the unencompassable, the transcendent by virtue of a certain different trait.⁵

For Levinas, the site of this radical excess from the other is *the face*.⁶ The Nation's alterity is rooted in its *face* and the experience of the Nation's alterity resides in the face-to-face encounter, which forces us to grapple with its otherness in the infinity of the other.⁷ Ideally, this should initiate a discourse or dialogue, but realistically a host of violent responses are evoked that do not welcome the face of the other but determine to strike the face, impede the face, cover the face, to murder the face, or at least attempt such.

Alterity, as it relates to the NOI, involves areas where it can be observed or experientially encountered. One very prominent area is the NOI's sociological structure. It is the NOI's sociological dimension that caught the attention of early NOI researchers.⁸ The military structure of the NOI, especially as a religious community, certainly is strange, difficult, alarming, and monstrous even. The NOI's disciplining of Black bodies takes direct aim at the predominant culture that has reactively become a part of Black

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas," by Tamara Wright, Peter Hughes, and Alison Ainley, trans. Andrew Benjamin and Tamara Wright, in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 170.

⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas," by Tamara Wright, Peter Hughes, and Alison Ainley, trans. Andrew Benjamin and Tamara Wright, in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988).

"The face is fundamental. It does not have any systematic character. It is a notion through which man comes to me via a human act different from knowing" (171).

⁷ See Emmanuel Levinas, "The Paradox of Morality," 171.

⁸ See Erdmann D. Beynon's "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit" (1938); Hatim A. Sahib's "The Nation of Islam" (1951); Mike Wallace's "The Hate That Hate Produced" (1959); E. U. Essien-Udom's *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* (1962); and C. Eric Lincoln's *The Black Muslims in America* (1961).

culture. While the sociological approach can be extremely helpful in understanding the Nation, this is not where the roots of the Nation's alterity can be found.

1.3 The Theological Face of the Nation

The concept of the face helps us countenance the alterity that seems to make the NOI inaccessible to totalizing systems. Alterity, in this sense should not be simply reduced to a category of being or a mode of being, although aspects of alterity are congruent with these categories. Consequently, alterity demands indirect approaches and methodologies. For instance, attitudes toward and reaction to the Nation's perceived face serves as a trace of what lies beneath or is *taking place* under the name *Nation of Islam*.

In this theo-philosophical analysis of the foundations of the Nation's face, what emerges is a theological framework and approach to studying the Nation of Islam. While other studies have attempted to explain the Nation of Islam in terms of the economic, social, and political needs of Black communities in America, this study will show how the driving force of the Nation of Islam is its theological propensity for deconstruction, dialogue, justice, and liberation.

There have been numerous writers who have undertaken the task of covering the Nation of Islam over the years with the expressed intention of better understanding its broad impact and implications for America in general and the Black community in particular. These studies have looked at the Nation of Islam under a variety of lights, from being a quasi-religious cult to being a nationalistic, socio-political movement. Regardless of the perspective, the NOI's theology has too often been ignored and judged as being fundamentally unsound and lacking any real theological substance. Despite the Nation's consistent engagement of the Black church and Black theological discourse, and

its consistent deconstructive challenge to both, the theological thrust of the Nation of Islam has been grossly minimized, ignored and/or caricatured beyond authentic recognition.

1.4 Method, Objectivity, and the Presence of the Researcher

Defining the Nation has contributed significantly to the problem of studying the Nation of Islam. It is the definition that determines the methodology. What is the Nation of Islam exactly? Is it a socio-political organization? Is it a religious movement? Is it a collective economic platform for Black Americans? These questions often dictate what the appropriate methodology for adequately studying the NOI will be. Which of these designations or definitions are more appropriate and best lend themselves to providing a clear understanding of the NOI? The Nation of Islam is undoubtedly a *religious* organization, rooted in the *religious* experience of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. Without this understanding one may be poised to commit gross errors regarding the NOI. Beyond a simple misidentification, one may actually be providing a pretext for employing an inadequate methodology. As such, one is faced with the problem of determining an appropriate methodology that leads to greater and deeper understanding. Prior to addressing this, the chasm that inherently exists between the researcher and the religion being studied must be examined.

The researcher's need for a method inherently intimates *distance* or *displacement* from the subject matter or object of study. The very word method comes from the Greek *méthodos*, which means the ordered pursuit of knowledge, and it is comprised of two root

words, *méta* (after) and *hodós* (way, oath, motion journey).⁹ The researcher is not at the destination of understanding, they have the arduous task of arriving there, but it is the method that will determine where exactly they will arrive.¹⁰ Since it is the researcher who is attempting to get where the religion is, are the members or adherents in a better position of understanding than the researcher? Is the believer-researcher in a more privileged position than the non-believing researcher? These questions are fueled by a variety of cultural, axiological, epistemological, and ontological presupposition.

If religion is to be constructed as human *ultimate concern*¹¹ or as a response to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*,¹² then it would follow that those who are considered to be at a distance from said religion would be at an epistemological disadvantage. At best, one can only approximate the experiences of adherents of a religion. It would be naïve to presume that it is possible for the researcher to get inside the believers' heads, especially since the religious experience is highly personal and requires a considerable degree of commitment. The adherents of religion often maintain that one must have faith to fully experience or understand the religion, its adherents, and the religious experience. One glaring problem is the problem with objectivity. Researchers from every discipline are concerned with obtaining and maintaining the guise of objectivity. To get inside a religious tradition seems to sacrifice this much-coveted objectivity that's associated with

⁹ "Method," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed March 23, 2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/method>.

¹⁰ What needs to be noted here is that even those who are in the religion may not be at the proverbial destination and may need a *method* to pierce the core of the religion.

¹¹ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 10.

¹² Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 13–19.

scholarly investigations. This tendency, especially in recent years, has been called into question and deconstructed.¹³

Such an approach seems to render invisible the objective nature of scholarship. It pretends that the categories leveled against subject matters, in this case religious traditions, are somehow naturally derived from the religion itself. More specifically, it purports that the logic prompting certain questions that guide religious study is self-evident and possesses a quality of universality that validates unifying undergirding particularities. Operating in this manner, such a totalizing tendency becomes an exercise of hegemonic power and an attempt to sublimate the exercise of said power by naturalizing it.

Secondly, an approach of this kind does not acknowledge or address the subjectivity of the researcher. Bias and prejudice are rendered nonexistent by the proclaimed position taken up by the researcher. As a result, questions of authority are eliminated before they can begin to destabilize the researcher's endeavor to proceed from the fantastic position of objectivity. Such an omission does not have to be construed as an intended assault against the aims of scholarship, but more like an unconscious oversight that has a significant impact on the outcomes. Nor can this orientation be overcome by merely mentioning it. Instead, the aforementioned void must be removed through the actual presence of the researcher.

Accordingly, the approach must allow the researcher to be present wholly and completely. Only then can the researcher close this apparent loop and fill this nagging void fully and authentically. Such a move would help avoid the specter of objectivity's

¹³ See Russell McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

ghost, the disembodied ideology of objectivity that seems to be haunting religious studies. While allowing such presence may complicate or add a considerable degree of complexity to the study of religion, it will also enrich it and add a considerable amount of depth. Whereas in orientations past, challenges, questions, and nods were unidirectional and pointed at the subjects, this orientation transforms the encounter into a multidirectional exchange between peers, where each is vulnerable, exposed, present, and challenged.

1.5 The Absence of Theological Hospitality in the Study of the Nation

One dimension of this problem concerns methodology and approach. It may very well be that one has to occupy an internal space in order to fully understand the Nation of Islam and its theology. It could very well be that the sociological studies on the NOI were theoretically better suited because of their presumed distance and objectivity. Would it be too much to ask or require one to traverse such distance in order to close the theological gaps and ascertain a required degree of understanding and apprehension? It must be admitted that the sociological approaches have yielded a wealth of information about the Nation of Islam as a community, religious organization and movement within the context of America, but this approach has missed the mark in regard to penetrating the often-thick religious language and unraveling the myriads of complex myths, concepts and worldviews. Perhaps a phenomenological approach would allow one to enter the Nation and to know it from the inside out. But what is this ‘inside-outside’ dichotomy that seems to haunt this and all such endeavors? The fundamental problem that arises in studying the Nation of Islam is that it is not approached with the sort of consideration that leads to

understanding, and therefore the resulting theological face often emerges distorted and/or veiled in terms of its theological countenance.

In his classic text, *The Black Muslims in America*, C. Eric Lincoln provided one of the best technical sociological works on the Nation of Islam but gave very scant attention to the Nation of Islam's complex theology. For him, the Nation of Islam was just one of many organizational reactions to the social predicament that Black people found themselves facing. Marcus Garvey, Father Divine, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and Daddy Grace all had movements that attempted to "redress the excesses or the insufficiencies of a past unreconciled to a self-perceived identity" of Blacks in America, and the Nation of Islam was no different; but quite astonishingly, the Nation did not implode, as the others, under the weight of its deficits, nor did it become an empty symbol in the face of its shortcomings.¹⁴ Lincoln failed to realize that the Nation of Islam was not an absolute functionary of the socio-political needs and reality of Black America. It was its "self-perceived identity," rooted in its theology, which allowed and continues to allow the Nation to remain relevant, challenging and renewed. Even Lincoln had to admit that

Because the motivational dynamics that drive the movement are unlikely to be satisfied in the foreseeable future, its survival seems indefinitely assured if the vision and the integrity of the leadership can be preserved. It has already surmounted its largest hurdle by surviving the trauma of 'first succession,' but lesser challenges still await it. This is why any study that undertakes to keep abreast of the movement must be updated from time to time as the movement continues its search for equality of survival consistent with its self-perceived identity.¹⁵

¹⁴ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), xxii.

¹⁵ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, xxii.

The “motivational dynamics” and “self-perceived identity” of the NOI of course, are rooted in the Nation's organically complex theological system.

In *Black Nationalism*, E. U. Essien-Udom provided another very important study of the Nation of Islam as a nationalistic religious organization with an eschatologically driven worldview and theology. For him, the Nation of Islam represents:

... an esoteric, in-group struggle to provide standards by which social, cultural, and moral life of the Negro masses can be raised to a meaningful community fabric... The movement combines the attractions of religion, nationalism, and political "pies in the sky" with a peculiar sense of belonging and achievement and proposes the possibility of "greater" achievement for its members...Religious and nationalistic symbols, combined with a mutilated version of western eschatology, endow the practical and moral concerns of the members with meaning and a strong sense of purpose and destiny.¹⁶

What Essien-Udom perceives as being 'mutilated' is the byproduct of not taking into full account the Nation's religious and nationalistic symbols as functions within their particular theological system, so there should be no surprise when aspects of the Nation appear mutilated, distorted, or monstrous. Even in identifying the nation's import to the Black community he seems to halt just shy of its theological boundaries, refusing to penetrate or address them. Accordingly, the Nation of Islam is said to be important "not because it tells whites how bitterly Negroes feel about their present conditions, but for showing the Negro masses 'why' they feel the way they do, 'how' they may get out of their degradation, and 'how' they may become self-respecting citizens."¹⁷ Behind the *why* and the *how* is more than a robust economic and social response; there is a much-neglected theological wellspring as well.

¹⁶ E. U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 336–37.

¹⁷ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 337.

In a more religiously and theologically oriented work, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam*¹⁸ provides a commendable scholarly examination of the NOI as a complex religious organization. Instead of examining the NOI's theology in its own terms, however, the work proceeds to evaluate the NOI using Islamic orthodoxy as the referential backdrop. Consequently, the Nation is presented as a quasi-Islamic, anti-intellectual movement that is in desperate need of religious legitimization. This work arguably leaves the Nation religiously othered and marginalized, sentenced to occupy the margins and to remain in a perpetual apologetic mode of self-exposition.

The Nation of Islam is often deemed as being too theologically bankrupt or too religiously foreign to be considered for any serious religious consideration or dialogue. As a result, there is the tendency to avoid dealing with the Nation of Islam and its theology directly, but there has been an affinity for indirect engagements via such figures as Malcolm X. Ironically, Malcolm X appears to be a relatively safer and more manageable dialogue partner than the Nation of Islam itself. It must be acknowledged that Malcolm X was an extraordinary representative and pioneer for the Nation of Islam, but it must be equally acknowledged that he was a spokesperson, minister, and teacher of the Nation of Islam's theology, not his own. For the years that Malcolm X was a member of the Nation of Islam, he espoused and explicated a particular theological system of NOI beliefs. This is the site of turbidity and difficulty regarding understanding both Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam.

Even when Malcolm X is being examined, there seems to be a tendency to disassociate him from, or pay very little attention to, the religious dimension that made

¹⁸ Edward E. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

him *Brother Minister Malcolm*. Louis A. DeCaro's *Malcolm and the Cross*¹⁹ attempts to show the constructive and deconstructive interactions between Malcolm X, the Nation of Islam, and the Christian tradition, but there is an overt tendency to extract the Nation of Islam from Malcolm X and vice versa. This tendency is completely unwarranted and leads to a distortion of both Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. James H. Cone, the father of Black Liberation Theology, observes:

Even Malcolm's devotees often ignore the central place of religion in his perspective, interpreting him as if his political philosophy can be understood apart from his faith and theology. Malcolm was a deeply religious person who thought of himself as a minister of God (and was pleased to be called "Minister Malcolm") just like the Reverends Martin King and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.²⁰

Malcolm X, like the Nation of Islam's theology, simply cannot be adequately examined in the absence of theological hospitality. Such would involve an authentic reception, respect, and interaction with the *religious Other* in all of its *otherness*.

James Cone actually extends this sort of theological hospitality to Malcolm X, allowing an authentic, non-decaffeinated²¹ Malcolm X to appear, challenge, deconstruct and enrich Cone's construction and articulation of Black Power, Black Liberation and Black Theology.²² What is peculiar and unique is that by welcoming Malcolm, Cone also extended a considerable degree of welcome to the Nation of Islam and its theology. This is warranted by the fact that the Nation of Islam cannot be written off simply as a one-dimensional, racist, shallow religious cult, but must be viewed as a much more

¹⁹ Louis A. DeCaro, *Malcolm and the Cross: The Nation of Islam, Malcolm X, and Christianity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

²⁰ James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 164.

²¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 58. This term is borrowed from Žižek and is directly connected to his use of *jouissance*.

²² James H. Cone does a particularly strong job of weaving together the themes of Black Power, Christ/God, and liberation. See James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

resourceful religious landscape.²³ What resulted from Cone's capacity to resist dismissing the Nation was a considerable understanding of the Nation's theology, the insight that it was a viable source of theological substance and the recognition that it was worthy of further inquiry:

In Malcolm's theology, God, Jesus, the prophets, and the "Original Man" were portrayed as black, and the prophets, and the devil and all things all evil things were pictured as white. Of course, to some persons, Malcolm's reversal of the color value system, exchanging the places of black and white, may appear to be nothing but reverse racism. But it is more than that. He was making a theological statement about God which is commonly found among peoples of the world whose religions portray God as being more than a mere extension of the ideology of the ruling class. In a society where blacks have been enslaved and segregated for nearly four centuries by whites because of their color and where evil has been portrayed as "black" and good as "white" in religious and cultural values, the idea that "God is black" is not only theologically defensible, but is a necessary corrective against the powers of domination... What is clear, however, is that Malcolm's theology demands much more attention than the simplistic claim that he was a racist.²⁴

By extension, one can assert that the Nation of Islam's theology, which was Malcolm's theology, demands the same serious theological excavation and exploration. At the very least, the Nation of Islam needs to be given space at the dialogical table to have its beliefs laid out and seriously examined. It is the latter that seems to be the most problematic.

A clear step in the right direction can be found in Anthony Pinn's *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*.²⁵ In his chapter on Islam, he does an impressive

²³ This point is explicitly made in Manning Marable's *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Books, 2011), 285. He states: "Leaving the Nation of Islam meant much more than departing a religious cult; he would be abandoning an entire spiritual geography. Thus, the Nation presented to its converts a comprehensive global system of race, 'pitting black Islam against white Christianity in a worldwide and historic struggle'... Despite Malcolm's support for the Nation's move toward Islamization, as late as December 1963 he agreed with Yacub's History and embraced the notion that Muhammad's contact with Fard was with Allah in human form. In his interview with Lomax in late December 1963, he insisted vigorously that Elijah had talked with God personally."

²⁴ James Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 160.

²⁵ Anthony B. Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

job of laying out a clear picture of the foundational components of the Nation of Islam's theology. However, he does bypass a very valuable opportunity to place the NOI theology in serious dialogue with the humanism that is covered in the following chapter.²⁶ While he does evoke the name of Elijah Muhammad and/or the Nation of Islam a few times in the humanism chapter, it was only in support of presenting the views of particular humanists (e.g. James Baldwin²⁷ and Norm Allen²⁸), but not once was the connection made with the Nation of Islam itself, which is in fact a humanist religious organization with a very distinct theological anthropology.²⁹ To miss this is to miss *why* and *how* the Nation of Islam is able to have such a significant impact across an array of political, economic, religious, spiritual, social and philosophical categories. This presents a considerable problem for those who wish to ignore and/or relegate the nation to some distorting category of insignificance.

1.6 The Nation's Theological Language and the Concealed Love Narrative

Related to the above problem, and certainly a crucial component to appropriately examining the NOI, is the issue of theological framing and concept contextualization. The Nation of Islam simply cannot be understood outside of being a function of its theological core. It is absolutely crucial that its theology is properly appropriated and

²⁶ Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*, 118–45.

²⁷ Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*, 164.

²⁸ Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*, 180. Norm Allen recalls how he was influenced by the Black Power Movement, the teachings of the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party. The Nation had a tremendous impact on both the Black Power movement and the Black Panther Party.

²⁹ Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*, 182. It can be inferred that the Nation of Islam would agree 100% with the African-American Humanist Declaration of 1990 when it proclaims that "Today the world needs a critical, rational, and humane approach to living." This is what both humanism and the Nation of Islam stand on.

contextualized within its own theological framework and language.³⁰ This is far less likely to occur, and it is more likely that other, more peripheral aspects of the NOI are given an unjustifiable degree of attention and magnification, which leads to the aforementioned distortion(s). The NOI's particular theology is mediated by a particular language, with its own system of signification and meaning, and it is here that one discovers the rudiments of authentic theological understanding. For instance, the Nation of Islam's theology considers itself to be a *mathematical theology*. One of the foundational axioms of the Nation of Islam's doctrine is that *Mathematics is Islam and Islam is Mathematics*.³¹ If misunderstood, as it often is, one would be tempted to reduce this Mathematical theology of the NOI to some cheap numerology. The Nation of Islam's emphasis on mathematics is much deeper and more far-reaching than many have let on. But because of the surface treatment of the Nation of Islam's theology there is a void left worthy of exploration.

Another void that is often glossed over and veiled is the reading of the Elijah-Fard³² encounter as a love narrative. If every love story begins with an initial cataclysm, a coming together, that signals the commencement of the love process, then these two—

³⁰ This point is supported often when problems arise with the NOI's concept of God. Often when the nation of Islam's conceptualization of God is analyzed, it is often compared to other Christian and Islamic orthodoxy. This is a mistake. The Nation of Islam stands as a deconstructive challenge to both Christian and Islamic orthodoxies, so it is not in the best interests of research to solely examine the Nation of Islam with the evaluative lenses of other theological systems that do not have as their starting points those of the Nation of Islam. It may be, nevertheless, fruitful to put them in dialogue.

³¹ The Lessons clearly state that "After learning Mathematics, which is Islam, and Islam is Mathematics, it stands true. You can always prove it at no limit of time. Then you must learn to use it and secure some benefit while you are living, that is – luxury, money, good homes, friendship in all walks of life. Sit yourself in Heaven at once! That is the greatest Desire of your brother and Teachers. Now you must speak the language so you can use your Mathematical Theology in the proper Term – otherwise you will not be successful unless you do speak well, for she knows all about you." From Fard Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom Lessons* (Chicago: The Final Call, 1995), 6.

³² Wallace D. Fard is also known as W. D. Fard, Fard Muhammad, Master Fard Muhammad, W. F. Muhammad, and Wallace Fard Muhammad.

Fard and Elijah— constitute *the Two* that represent the commencement of the Nation's love narrative. In his book *Conditions*, Alain Badiou argues that it is best to approach love as a process that is marked by the advent (*ad-venue*) of *the Two*, which has its origins in the event-encounter.³³ Elsewhere he goes on to assert that "love contains an initial element that separates, dislocates and differentiates. You have *Two*. Love involves *Two*."³⁴ Accordingly, it is from the appearance of this *Two* that we gain the seminal advent of the Nation's love story: the encounter.³⁵ Badiou maintains that "(l)ove always starts with an encounter," which is comprised of all of the mundane, risky, contingent, historical features, and yet it carries within it something outside the natural order.³⁶ Likewise, the inaugural event of the Nation of Islam's love story can be traced back to the initial encounter of one Elijah Poole— a Georgia-born son of a sharecropper— and one Arab-born stranger whose first name actually meant foreigner or stranger— Wallace D. Fard.

It is quite apparent that the theology of the Nation of Islam needs serious exploration. There also seems to be indication that a dialogue with the Nation of Islam could prove to be quite fruitful. In order to engage the Nation, there must be a clear presentation of its theological face with all of its *jouissance*.³⁷ What is at the core of the Nation of Islam's theology? How does the Nation view its own theology (in their own

³³ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008), 189.

³⁴ Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (New York: The New Press, 2012), 28.

³⁵ See Alireza Nurbakhsh, "Divine Love," Nimatullahi Sufi Order, accessed March 23, 2022, <https://www.nimatullahi.org/discourses/love>. Dr. Nurbakhsh discusses the essence of the encounter that often appears unassuming and mundane, yet facilitates the experience and reciprocation of divine love.

³⁶ Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 28.

³⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 58. This term is borrowed from Žižek and includes the reference to the other's internal ecstatic enjoyment of life. This also connects to Levinas's concept of enjoyment. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 87.

terms)? How does it view the divine, human being and the world? What is its approach to scriptures? How does it view Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon them)? What are its intersections with and points of departure from orthodox Islam and Christianity? There is also a need to put the Nation in dialogue with some very unlikely dialogue partners in order to fully appreciate its theological complexity and adaptability.

1.7 Conclusion: Framing, Scope, and the Movement of the Dissertation

While it would be worthwhile to examine the precise measured effects of the media's framing of the Nation of Islam as a marginalized other, such lies outside the focus and scope of this work. Instead, I am interested in how such framing forecloses upon discursive encounters with the Nation of Islam. Specifically, in this Introduction, I wanted to raise the problem of how the media's framing becomes ideological in its capacity to set guidelines for subsequent discourse and engagement. Stuart Hall perspicuously points out that these "(p)articular discursive formulations would, then, be ideological, not because of the manifest bias or distortions of their surface contents, but because they were generated out of, or were transformed based on a limited ideological matrix or set."³⁸ These ideological discursive formulations have served as "master frames" and have resulted in a pre-set range of responses, from all-out avoidance to calls for the Nation's annihilation, but the call for authentic engagement is virtually nonexistent.

³⁸ Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in *Culture, Society and the Media*, ed. Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, and Janet Woollacott (London: Methuen, 1982), 67–68.

Chapter 2 examines the framing of the Nation of Islam in popular media and foundational academic literature. It traces how the Nation has been presented through frames such as the Voodoo cult, the hate movement, the hostile pseudo-religious deviant, the Black nationalist threat, the separatist movement, and the ministry of rage. The chapter argues that these frames did not merely describe the Nation; they helped produce a distorted public image that impeded authentic encounter.

Chapter 3 turns from framing to violence. Using Levinas's concept of the face, the chapter argues that the violence directed toward the Nation is aimed at the other's capacity for self-presentation, self-articulation, and speech. This chapter develops the concept of monstrosification as the artificial reconstruction of the other's face into something dangerous, grotesque, threatening, or unworthy of ethical regard.

Chapter 4 examines the deeper philo-theological and methodological conditions that make such violence possible. It argues that the Western ontological tradition often begins from the security of the same, producing methods that seek to comprehend, classify, and possess the other before receiving the other ethically. This chapter therefore calls for a pre-methodological turn that precedes method with responsibility.

Chapter 5 examines the face-to-face, the cogito, and the event. It develops the relation between the speaking face, the self-enclosed subject, and the possibility of an event that interrupts the same's possession of meaning. In doing so, it prepares the movement from critique toward the Nation's own self-expression.

Chapter 6 turns toward the Nation's own speech and impossible love story. It asks what becomes visible when the Nation is encountered not as an object of representation,

but as a religious other who speaks through its own foundational event, theological self-expression, and witness of love.

Given this face-to-face encounter, what might the unmuted face of the Nation express? Unencumbered by the gaze that has distorted its alterity, what might the Nation's face reveal or speak? What possibilities, even monstrous ones, might emerge when the Nation is encountered through its own face rather than through the frames imposed upon it? To begin answering these questions, we must explore the *sine qua non* of the Nation's face and consider what the same's monstrosified and veiled image of the Nation has suppressed.

CHAPTER 2.

FRAMING THE NATION

The Nation of Islam has become one of the most influential Black religious movements in America, and yet it has remained one of the most misunderstood Black religious movements of the 20th century.¹ The Nation has often found itself in the middle of extremely polarizing religious and socio-political controversies within the United States and beyond. From the matrix of the Nation has arisen an array of controversial and significant historical figures: The Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad, Mother Clara Muhammad, Malcolm X (El Hajj Malik Shabazz), Muhammad Ali, W.D. Muhammad (Imam Warith Deen Muhammad) and Minister Louis Farrakhan. One major problem that has persisted with the Nation is how it has been presented and perceived within foundational academic literature and mass media from 1930 to 1996. This chapter argues that these presentations did not merely describe the Nation from the outside; they produced interpretive frames that shaped the conditions under which the Nation could be seen, judged, feared, dismissed, or refused as a religious other.

One way that the Nation has been presented has been to overemphasize one aspect or another at the expense of the Nation's religious and theological significance. There has been very little hesitation to reduce the Nation to sociological, political, economic, and nationalistic categories, while ignoring its religio-theological significance. It is not that the NOI does not correspond significantly to these other categories; rather, it

¹ Stephen C. Finley, "'The Secret... of Who the Devil Is': Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam, and Theological Phenomenology" in *New Perspectives on the Nation of Islam*, ed. Dawn-Marie Gibson and Herbert Berg (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 154.

is that this tendency deliberately buries the Nation's capacity to exceed and destabilize these categorizations apropos its particular religiosity. It is, nevertheless, both reasonable and understandable to emphasize certain dimensions when speaking on or writing about something, just as Anna Dorte Feifel argues and points out:

Accordingly, any speaking or writing act reduces and emphasizes reality to a specific aspect. When someone, for example talks or writes about a student, and introduces the student as Muslim by mentioning that she wears hijab or burqa. This depiction signifies a selection and emphasis of one aspect of reality, because the author emphasizes one part of her story while ignoring others, like for example being a sister or being a straight A student or any other facet of her biography.²

The most obvious benefit of emphasizing and focusing on certain particulars of an individual, group, or event is that one can actually use the resulting knowledge as a basis for deeper understanding and the enrichment of discourse. Problems arise when idiosyncratic particulars are raised to the level of authentic signifiers, even to the extent of operating as metonymies for respective others.

The Nation of Islam's image in the popular media and academic literature (from the 1930s to the mid-1990s) was one of Black Nationalism, Black supremacy, anti-white racism, anti-Semitism, pseudo-religiosity, hate, hostility – all having totalizing effects. These particulars were not just emphasized but also given the power to name, thereby given the illusion and legitimacy of a given identity.³ The Nation itself has insisted that “a good name is better than gold” and that one's name has power “to associate an entire order of a particular civilization simply by name alone.”⁴ The Nation has consistently

²Anna Dorte Feifel, "Islamic Veiling in Western Societies: A Critical Frame Analysis of the Role of Online German Newspaper Comments in the (Re)production or Challenge of Islamophobia" (master's thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2016), 33.

³ Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 9. Derrida cautions us against the assent and power given to the generalizations that come with proper names and naming, which can take us away from the singularity that the name should represent.

⁴ Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman* (Chicago, IL: Muhammad's Temple No. 2, 1965), 54–55.

challenged the dominant society's privilege and power to name it. The power of naming and labeling should not be underestimated, especially when the designation is an intentional negative projection and an attempt at caricaturing the other. (This will be explored further in Chapter 4, wherein names will be examined as indicators of something arriving or taking place).

2.1 The Master's Frames

If one examines some of the core and foundational sources on the Nation of Islam,⁵ one can recognize particular patterns of *framing*,⁶ which are generally employed to establish a “schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large.”⁷ Framing, as a concept and an analytical paradigm, can help us “understand and illuminate, namely the generation, diffusion, and functionality of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meaning,”⁸ especially as they relate to the Nation of Islam. Robert Entman explicates framing as follows:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.⁹

⁵ See Erdmann D. Beynon's "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit" (1938); Hatim A. Sahib's "The Nation of Islam" (1951); Mike Wallace's "*The Hate That Hate Produced*" (1959); E. U. Essien-Udom's *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* (1962); and C. Eric Lincoln's *The Black Muslims in America* (1961).

⁶ For an in-depth discourse on framing, see Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

⁷ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 21.

⁸ Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 612.

⁹ Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 52.

Sometimes, when frames are extraordinarily broad, flexible, and inclusive, they become “master frames.”¹⁰ These “master frames” function as a kind of “master algorithm that colors and constrains the orientations and activities of other movements.”¹¹ While frames can be facilitative in terms of condensing and simplifying a vast array of information, framing can also deploy the sort of heuristics that appropriates *others* in categories that often evoke violent reactions and violent treatment. Journalists and scholars alike often move beyond the interpretative function and become “signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers”¹² – agents actively engaged in what Stuart Hall called the “politics of signification.”¹³ One significant outcome of this is the persistent and pervasive use of terms, narratives, imageries, evocations, etc. that erect a distorted *a priori* imaginary or psychic anticipatory experience of the Nation, which is then used to justify its exclusion, maltreatment, and marginalized position. It is rather remarkable that the NOI has remained extant in the face of the kind of framing that has explicitly called for its destruction and has made its proverbial and literal death not worthy of mourning.¹⁴ Despite this tendency, the Nation of Islam has consistently asserted itself and has remained open to engaging with Black Churches, Black theological traditions, Orthodox

¹⁰ Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements,” 618.

¹¹ Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements,” 618.

¹² Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements,” 613.

¹³ Stuart Hall, “The Rediscovery of Ideology: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies,” in *Culture, Society and the Media*, ed. Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, and Janet Woollacott (New York: Methuen, 1982), 56–90, esp. 64–68.

¹⁴ See Judith Butler, “Why Preserve the Life of the Other?” *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values – Interpreting Non-Violence* (lecture, University of California, Berkeley, March 30, 2016), YouTube video, 1:23:45, posted by “UCBerkeleyEvents,” April 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40YPnzv5JzM>.

Islam, and Judeo-Christian orientations, even if only as a confrontational dialogue partner at times.

While what follows is not an in-depth framing analysis, it is a highlight of certain framing tendencies that have constituted a certain type of violence towards the Nation of Islam as a religious *other*. Specifically, what is witnessed is the intentional distortion of the Nation's *visage* or image, which has had the power to impede the Nation's ability to show up and speak on its own behalf. By highlighting these framing tendencies in the foundational and inaugural sources on the Nation, the intention is to open discursive doorways to the academic methodological implications for approaching religious others, such as the Nation of Islam. Ultimately, this will lead us to more pre-methodological considerations.

2.2 Framing the Nation as Hate: The Hate That Hate Produced

In the summer of 1959 on Channel 13's News Beat show in New York, Mike Wallace took to the airways to broach a very "disturbing story,"¹⁵ one that took on a very serious and ominous tone. The intended aim of this production, entitled *The Hate That Hate Produced*, was to make the American public aware of this story of "the rise of Black racism, of the call for Black supremacy among a small but growing segment of the American Negro population."¹⁶ Wallace asserted that "while city officials, state agencies, white liberals, and sober-minded negroes" stood idly by, "a group of Negro dissenters" had begun using "street corner step ladders, church pulpits, sports arenas and ballroom platforms across the United States to preach a gospel of hate that would set off a federal

¹⁵ Mike Wallace, "The Hate That Hate Produced," *PBS Archives*, 1:34:46, July 13–17, 1959, 00:27–00:29, <https://archive.org/details/PBSTheHateThatHateProduced>.

¹⁶ Wallace, "The Hate That Hate Produced," 00:15–00:23.

investigation if it were preached by southern whites.”¹⁷ To ensure that one did not surmise this assessment to be inaccurate, Mike Wallace invited viewers to see and hear for themselves what these dissident Negroes were actually saying:

I charge the white man with being the greatest liar on earth! I charge the white man with being the greatest drunkard on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest swine eater on earth – yet the Bible forbids it! I charge the white man with being the greatest gambler on earth. I charge the white man, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, with being the greatest murderer on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest peace-breaker on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest adulterer on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest robber on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest deceiver on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest troublemaker on earth. So therefore, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I ask you, bring back a verdict of guilty as charged!¹⁸

The thunderous applause that followed the scathing presentation in the footage that Wallace showed left no surprise that the accused would be found guilty as charged and, of course, given a sentence of death. Up to this point, Mike Wallace had presented this nameless menace much in the same way that Mary Shelley presented her caustic “fiend,” “demon,” or simply put, “Monster.”¹⁹ Mike Wallace’s *monster*, “a Negro religious group,” who reportedly called themselves “the Muslims”²⁰ – a generic designation that was inept as a signifier but certainly effective at contributing to the overall baleful ethos of the show. This was a name that was not quite a name; it was more of an alleged indication of what lurked under the surface. Wallace adverted to this suspicious, almost paranoic gaze when he warned that these Muslims:

¹⁷ Wallace, “The Hate That Hate Produced,” 01:13–01:37.

¹⁸ Wallace, “The Hate That Hate Produced,” 01:39–02:35. The words were actually taken from a play, *The Trial*, written by the then-Minister of the Boston Temple, Louis X, today known as Minister Louis Farrakhan.

¹⁹ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁰ Wallace, “The Hate That Hate Produced,” 03:10–03:14.

... use a good deal of the paraphernalia of the traditional religion of Islam, but they are fervently disavowed by orthodox Muslims. These home-grown, Negro American Muslims are the most powerful of the Black Supremacist groups. They now claim a membership of at least a quarter of a million negroes. Their doctrine is being taught in fifty cities across the nation. Let no one underestimate the Muslims.”²¹

The Nation was framed as a Black supremacist menace that somehow managed to ironically skulk in plain sight, right under the unsuspecting American gaze in cities across the country. Wallace’s framing made it clear that this pseudo-Islamic group of deviants was not to be trusted, not even as Muslims, and was to be feared, regarded as dangerous, and shown gratuitous hostility.

Soon after the airing of *The Hate That Hate Produced*, the television critic John Crosby wrote about it glowingly, and the *U.S. News & World Report*, *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, *The Free Press* (Detroit) and other media outlets carried the narrative about “the Black Muslims.”²² Although the movement had already been active in cities across America since the 1930s, most Americans were likely to have never heard of the Nation of Islam. For those who had heard of the movement, most only had a superficial knowledge and knew very little about the movement and its audacious leader, the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad.²³ For those Blacks who had become acquainted with the group (members and sympathizers included), it was clear that Mike Wallace’s “Muslims” seemed to be a far cry from “the Nation” that had earned a considerable

²¹ Wallace, “The Hate That Hate Produced,” 03:15–03:40.

²² C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 103.

²³ E.U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for Identity in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 73.

degree of respect and honor in Black communities and made such a positive impression with their discipline and loyalty.²⁴

Herbert Shapiro, in his *White Violence and Black Response*, rightly noted that the “television narration confused condemnatory rhetoric with actual commitment to violence against whites. With regard to white-supremacist rhetoric about violence there was a history of translating racial animus into action. The difference was more than a matter of degree.”²⁵ The image of the Nation has been such that “an eventual eruption of violence seems always anticipated,” which ironically leads to violence directed at the Nation.²⁶ While Shapiro was correct to point out the error of such a prevarication, he failed to identify this type of confusion as another form of violence that was not coincidental but quite intentionally leveled against Blacks (as *others*) in general and the Nation of Islam in particular.

Mike Wallace boldly called for an exploration of “what should be done about the rising tide of Black supremacy,”²⁷ which alludes back to Entman’s “treatment recommendation”²⁸ mentioned earlier. It may proceed unnoticed that the purported association, appropriation, and interpretation of the *other* are never called into question and are given full assent. This kind of framing exacts the totalizing power of defining the other and becomes a call to violence. Furthermore, this framing initiates the justification for a particular dismissal, disregard, disdain, and dismemberment of its object. At the very least, the life of the other is not seen as worth preserving and the death of the other is

²⁴ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 74.

²⁵ Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 469.

²⁶ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 3.

²⁷ Mike Wallace, “The Hate That Hate Produced,” 01:04–01:10.

²⁸ Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” 52.

not seen as worthy of mourning.²⁹ Mike Wallace's use of the master framing of *hatred* and *Black supremacy* and the resultant images are not indigenous to the Nation but are externally imposed upon the Nation. Despite the tremendous opposition it has faced, the Nation has resisted this framing with what Robert Benford called "counter framing strategies."³⁰ These were used to cast off the imposed significations and signify on its own behalf, but sometimes these protestations were ingeniously muffled. *The Hate That Hate Produced* is an example of this.

In *The Hate That Hate Produced*, the charge of hatred was raised directly with the spiritual leader of the Nation, the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad, and his response was incorporated in the documentary. When asked by Louis Lomax if he had ever been accused of teaching hate, Elijah Muhammad responded, "Yes." Then, Lomax asked if he thought that he was teaching hate, and Elijah Muhammad retorted immediately, "No!" Lomax followed up: "Well, what is it that you teach, sir?" Elijah Muhammad exclaimed, "Truth!" and he then went on to state that if that truth was consequently classified as hate, then, he could not help that.³¹ In this response, we learn that Elijah Muhammad perceived his mission in terms of truth telling. Elijah Muhammad seemed to acknowledge the aim and power of the machinery that would, despite his objections and evidence to the contrary, deploy its *master algorithms* and categorize him in a manner that would not dignify his truth claims. Even Malcolm X, the then the

²⁹ See Judith Butler, "Why Preserve the Life of the Other?," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values—Interpreting Non-Violence*, lecture, University of California, Berkeley, March 30, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coBcQajx18I>.

³⁰ Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 611–639. Benford and Snow discuss the numerous ways that social movements respond to "counter framing by movement opponents, bystanders, and the media; frame disputes within movements; and the dialectic between frames and events." (625).

³¹ Wallace, "The Hate That Hate Produced," 10:45–11:02.

National Representative of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, responded to the hatred framing by asserting a counter frame that was in direct contrast to the charge of hatred. This response came when Lomax asked him to explain why whites were not allowed to join the Nation of Islam, and Malcolm responded:

That's one of the reasons why most people think that Mr. Muhammad teaches hate, but if there is a rattle snake in the field who has been biting your brothers and your sisters, and you go and tell them that that's a rattlesnake and all the harm that has come to them has come to them from that particular source. Well then, that rattler will think that the warner is teaching hate. He'll go back and tell the other snakes that this man is teaching hate. But it's not hate. When you study people who have been harmed and discover the source of their injury, the source of all of their defects and you begin to point out that source. It's not that you hate the source, but your love for your people is so intense, so great, you must let them know what is wrong with them, what is the cause of their ills, and this is one of the basic factors that I believe involved when people think, or when the propaganda is put out, that Mr. Muhammad teaches hate. He teaches Black people to love each other and our love for each other is so strong, we don't have any room left in our heart...³²

The documentary did not explore or interrogate this professed love. It did not even dignify this counter-framing purported by the Muslims themselves, which would naturally *call into question* the framing that was being put forth by Mike Wallace. Such “framing contests,” which are “square-offs between movements and their detractors,”³³ are what we might have expected from conventional journalistic (and academic) objectivity, but this was not extended in the case of “the Muslims.” Daniel Hallin elucidates this tendency by pointing out that once individuals, groups and events are framed as deviants—beyond “the sphere of legitimate controversy”—the news media and its agents become “boundary-maintaining mechanisms;” and journalists are then empowered to focus on their “role of exposing, condemning, or excluding from the

³² Wallace, “The Hate That Hate Produced,” 15:17–16:35.

³³ Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements,” 626.

public agenda those who violate or challenge consensus values, and uphold the consensus distinction between legitimate and illegitimate political [and religious] activity.”³⁴ A very distinct feature of this kind of abreaction is that “the tone and language employed by journalists [and academic scholars] breaks from the conventional norms – detachment, balance, and objectivity – of news production.”³⁵ Objectivity and the call for critical discourse is jettisoned and the reiteration of the “hatred” and “Black supremacy” framing persists as if it is an unchallenged matter of fact, even in the face of the Nation’s reasonable objections to these labels. The responses from its spiritual leader and its national representative were not dignified or considered for further inquiry. The narrative continued as if their responses were of little or no consequence, and the dominant narrative continued as if nothing had been said at all – as if no objections could be raised to challenge the indictment of hatred and racism. The media’s thematization of the Nation was to become the unquestioned, privileged axiom, and their interpretive lenses were to become the hermeneutical lenses through which the Nation was to be gazed upon and judged.

The framings in *The Hate That Hate Produced* could be considered collective action frames because they extend beyond this interpretive function and move towards action-oriented ends.³⁶ While they are starkly distinct in many respects from social movement organizations, the mass media share in this tendency to “assign meaning to and interpret, relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize

³⁴ Daniel Hallin, *We Keep America on Top of the World*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 54. Hallin’s statement is, nevertheless, too limiting in terms of the scope of this tendency—more than the political categories are at stake. Furthermore, it is not forthcoming regarding the malevolent and violent nature of these mechanisms and their capacity to garner forces and sentence “deviant others” to proverbial death.

³⁵ S. Craig Watkins, “Framing Protest: News Media Frames of the Million Man March,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18, no. 1 (March 2001): 92–93.

³⁶ Benford and Snow, “Framing Process and Social Movements,” 614.

potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists.”³⁷ This becomes quite clear when the media is overtly involved in the “politics of signification.”³⁸

What one witnesses in *The Hate That Hate Produced* is a drama production via forceful framing. Mark McPhail asserts that “Wallace’s documentary helped set the stage for one of this nation’s most enduring dramas, a drama that would bring to the forefront of the American mind the Nation of Islam’s indictment of whiteness, its call for racial separation, and its accusations of collective guilt and social shame.”³⁹ McPhail’s assessment is a respectful and fair articulation of the Nation of Islam’s call and message, but it minimizes the intentional caricature and distortion of the Nation by *The Hate That Hate Produced*. McPhail does not give the documentary its deserved credit for reducing the Nation to themes that in no way fecundate discourse but actually foreclose upon them. The totalizing tendency of the media-mediated drama is that it is given a privileged position in the on-going narrative about the Nation of Islam as *the* narrative. Jacques Derrida nuanced this tendency in the following words:

This is one of the most serious problems today, this responsibility before the current forms of the mass media and especially before their monopolization, their framing, their axiomatics... I am resolutely for their development (there are never enough of them) and especially for their diversification, but also resolutely against their normalization, against the various takeovers to which the thing has given rise, which has in fact reduced to silence everything that does not conform to very determinate and very powerful frames or codes, or still yet to phantasms of what is “receivable.” But the first problem of the “media” is posed by what does not get translated, or even published in the dominant political languages,

³⁷ David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization,” in *International Social Movement Research*, ed. Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1988), 198.

³⁸ Snow and Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participation Mobilization,” 198.

³⁹ Mark Lawrence McPhail, *The Rhetoric of Racism Revisited: Reparations or Separation?* (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2001), 175–176.

the ones that dictate the laws of receivability, precisely, on the left as much as on the right.⁴⁰

The framing witnessed in *The Hate That Hate Produced* is overly reductionistic and conspicuously suffocates the significance of this religious other which aims to limit, discourage, and eliminate authentic engagement. It raises characters, characterizations, and themes of its own production that lack both the complexity and the *jouissance* of the actual other. The documentary could have also set the terms and conditions for future staged discourse. Instead, it called for action and then demonstrated what would be the proper response to “the Muslims” as an ominous other, with minimal social capital in the American habitus.⁴¹ It presented a model of how the Nation should be discussed and engaged. Such has the effect of encouraging artificial, staged encounters that were safe, and presented a distorted image of the other; both of which made an unscripted encounter with the other virtually impossible. What is clear is that *The Hate That Hate Produced* had as its aim the re-characterization or reconstruction of the *image* of this marginalized group in the worst possible light, but this was not the first time the Nation had faced this kind of intentional distortion. Within the two decades prior to the airing of this program there were other examples that displayed this kind of framing, treatment, and approach to the Nation of Islam.

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Points: Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 87.

⁴¹ This is a reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s terminology in *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 230.

2.3 Framing the Nation as Voodoo: The Ritualized Image of Black Religious Deviance

On November 20, 1932, Robert Harris, an alleged member of the Nation of Islam lured a James J. Smith, a roomer at the Harris home, into a back room, bashed his head with an automobile axle, laid him on a makeshift altar and plunged a knife into his heart.⁴² Harris confessed to the murder but insisted that Smith voluntarily offered up his life for the ritualized sacrifice.⁴³ In the initial reporting of this incident, Robert Harris was identified as “the Negro leader of a strange religious cult”⁴⁴ and a “self-crowned ‘king’ of a weird religious cult.”⁴⁵ As the story unfolded, it became clear that Harris was deranged, held no leadership position in the religious organization, and was, at best, a tolerated member or sympathizer.⁴⁶ There were attempts to even connect the Harris murder to the July 3, 1929 slaughter of Benny Evangelista and his family, but the forensics evidence (i.e., fingerprints) did not sustain this spurious connection.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, W.D. Fard, the true spiritual leader and founder of the Nation of Islam and the organization’s secretary, Ugan Ali, were subsequently brought in for questioning and placed under the psychiatric care and evaluation of Dr. David Clark at the Receiving Hospital.⁴⁸ The media reported that W.D. Fard stated that the violent acts of Harris were not in accord with his teachings but were an indication that Harris

⁴² “Head of Cult Admits Killing,” *Detroit News*, November 21, 1932, 1; “Leader of Cult Admits Slaying at Home Altar,” *The Detroit Free Press*, November 21, 1932, 1.

⁴³ “Voodoo Slayer Admits Plotting Death of Judges,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 22, 1932, 1.

⁴⁴ “Head of Cult Admits Killing,” *Detroit News*, 1.

⁴⁵ “Leader of Cult Admits Slaying at Home Altar,” *The Detroit Free Press*, 1.

⁴⁶ “Leader of Cult Called Insane,” *Detroit News*, November 22, 1932, 4; “Leader of Cult to be Quizzed,” *Detroit News*, November 23, 1932, 7.

⁴⁷ “Head of Cult Admits Killing,” *The Detroit News*, November 21, 1932, 1; “Leader of Cult Admits Slaying at Home Altar,” *The Detroit Free Press*, 1.

⁴⁸ “Negro Leaders Open Fight to Break Voodooism’s Grip,” *The Detroit Free Press*, November 24, 1932, 1.

“apparently misunderstood my [Fard’s] teachings” and that human sacrifices were not tolerated by the group.⁴⁹ Even with this admission from the true leader of the Nation, the sensationalized association of Harris’s actions and Voodooism with the Nation of Islam continued, and the murderous acts of Harris were presented as the Nation’s “homicidal practices.”⁵⁰ When the newspapers reported that 500 members of the Nation of Islam had marched to police headquarters to demand the release of their leaders, it was presented as if they were demanding the release of Harris, when in fact they were demanding the release of W.D. Fard and Ugan Ali.⁵¹ The media fueled speculations that the group supported “human sacrifice,” when its leadership had clearly condemned such actions.⁵² Interestingly, as late as November 27th, Harris was still being presented in the news as the self-styled leader or “‘king’ of the Order of Islam [The Nation of Islam].”⁵³ “The attribution of the actions of one mentally unstable person to the members of the Allah Temple of Islam [Nation of Islam] and its leaders is consistent with the sensationalized depictions of “voodooism” in Cuba and Haiti in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”⁵⁴

A group of Negro leaders called the Detroit Council of Social Service had been ‘aroused to action’ in order to “aid police in the battle to crush the hydra of jungle fanaticism” that they felt was preying upon Detroit Negroes.⁵⁵ This group demanded

⁴⁹ “Negro Leaders Open Fight to Break Voodooism’s Grip,” *The Detroit Free Press*, 1.

⁵⁰ “Intended Voodoo Victims’ Number Still Mounting,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 27, 1932, 1.

⁵¹ “500 Join March to Ask Voodoo King’s Freedom,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 24, 1932, 1.

⁵² Danielle N. Boaz, “The Voodoo Cult of Detroit: Race, Human Sacrifice, and the Nation of Islam from the 1930’s to the 1970’s,” *The Journal of Interreligious Studies* 23 (May 2018): 23.

⁵³ “Harris, Cult Killer, Becomes Violent” in *Detroit News*, November 27, 1932, 4.

⁵⁴ Danielle N. Boaz, “The Voodoo Cult of Detroit,” 24.

⁵⁵ “Negro Leaders Open Fight to Break Voodooism’s Grip,” *Detroit Free Press*, 1.

“that some action be taken for the purpose of disbanding the ‘Nation of Islam’”⁵⁶ Even the Superintendent of Schools, Frank Cody, put teachers in colored districts on the lookout for “irregularities in the classroom” as a result of the fear surrounding the growth of “Islamism” among Negroes.⁵⁷ The police Commissioner assigned a special squad of officers to disentangle “the cult’s tentacles, and take measures to wipe out the practices of the group.”⁵⁸ The authorities eventually forced W.D. Fard to leave Detroit quietly, and it was reported that the “Voodoo Reign Here is Broken,”⁵⁹ although this alleged reign neither existed nor could be associated with the Nation. W. D. Fard did, however, return to the city and was subsequently arrested in May of 1933.⁶⁰ When he was arrested it was announced that “Wallace D. Farad, self-styled King of Islam was being held by detectives of the Special Investigation Squad Thursday after he had been picked up in the Traymore Hotel.”⁶¹ It must be highlighted that the designation “King of Islam,” which was used exclusively for James Harris in 1932, was being used to refer to Fard a year later. Harris, on the other hand, was simply described as a “voodoo-crazed” Negro.⁶² The conflation of these two figures defies logic, unless the intention was a deliberate distortion of Fard’s and the Nation’s image.

As time progressed it seemed as if the scourge of Voodoo-ism was behind the Nation and things actually became rather quiet, until 1937 when Verlen McQueen was

⁵⁶ “New Human Sacrifice with a Boy as Victim is Averted by Inquiry,” *The Detroit Free Press*, November 26, 1932, 2.

⁵⁷ “Negro Leaders Open Fight to Break Voodooism’s Grip,” *Detroit Free Press*, 1.

⁵⁸ “Negro Leaders Open Fight to Break Voodooism’s Grip,” *Detroit Free Press*, 1.

⁵⁹ “Voodoo Reign Here Is Broken” *Detroit Free Press*, December 7, 1932, 7.

⁶⁰ “Banished Leader of Cult Arrested” *Detroit Free Press*, May 26, 1933, 10.

⁶¹ “Banished Leader of Cult Arrested” *Detroit Free Press*, 10.

⁶² “Banished Leader of Cult Arrested” *Detroit Free Press*, 10.

arrested for threatening to sacrifice his wife and daughter to Allah by boiling them.⁶³ The media depicted this new incident as a resurgence of the voodoo cult menace among Detroit Negroes, with police officers having to protect McQueen's wife and daughter from possible reprisals from McQueen's fellow cultists.⁶⁴ One year after the McQueen incident Erdmann Beynon published *The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants*.⁶⁵ This is the earliest formal study of the emerging Nation of Islam, and it has proven to be an invaluable resource for examining the Nation in its naissence. This piece provides crucial demographic information about the Nation's members and a vivid glimpse of the socio-economic conditions that had a direct bearing on the lives of early NOI members.⁶⁶ Quite importantly, glimpses of the work, words, and perceptions of W.D. Fard among the early followers are made accessible from the mouths of early NOI pioneers. Beynon's work even made a considerable contribution to the monograph found in the FBI files on the Nation of Islam⁶⁷ and it has been heavily used by subsequent scholars, such as Professor

⁶³ "Voodoo Leader Scares Couple into Collapse," *Daily Courier* (Connellsville, Pennsylvania), January 20, 1937, 1.

⁶⁴ "Voodoo Leader Scares Couple into Collapse," *Daily Courier*, 1; "Save Mother and Daughter from Sacrifice," *Morning Herald* (Uniontown, Pennsylvania), January 20, 1937, 18; "Police Halt Human Sacrifice to Allah by Detroit Voodoo Cult," *Dunkirk Evening Observer* (Dunkirk, NY), January 19, 1937, 1.

⁶⁵ Erdmann Doane Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," *American Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 6 (May 1938): 894–907.

⁶⁶ See Erdmann Beynon, *The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit*, 897–98, where he stated: "Interviews with more than 200 Moslem families showed that with less than half-a-dozen exceptions all were recent migrants from the rural South, the majority having come to Detroit from small communities in Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Investigations of cult members by the Wayne County Prosecutor's office also indicated the same origin. The interviews disclosed that the Moslems not only had migrated recently from the South, but also had visited their old homes in the South one or more times after their migration and before they had come in contact with the Nation of Islam. Through these visits they had become more conscious of race discrimination on the part of Caucasians. After their brief sojourn in the North, they tended to reinterpret with sinister implications incidents of race contact in the South."

⁶⁷ *Nation of Islam: The FBI Files*. The Federal Bureau of Investigations. Freedom of Information/Privacy Acts Section. Subject: Nation of Islam, Filiquarian Publishing, LLC.

C. Eric Lincoln⁶⁸ and Essien-Udom.⁶⁹ It is an important fact that this study “would become central to the Nation of Islam’s reputation because virtually every scholar writing about Wallace Fard, Elijah Muhammad, and Malcolm X since the 1930s has relied on Beynon for their work.”⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the prominence of the “voodoo” framing and the explicit distortion of the Nation’s image cannot be ignored.

The fact that Beynon, after all that he encountered firsthand with the Nation of Islam’s early followers, used the term "Voodoo Cult" in the title is indicative of the power and influence of the voodoo framing. He did state, however, that no “effort is made in this paper to trace relationship between this cult and Voodoo-ism in Haiti and other West Indian islands. The cult received the name "Voodoo" solely because of cases of human sacrifice.”⁷¹ Beynon had to admit this because it was clear that the Nation’s beliefs and practices did not have any direct correlation to the actual observance of Vodou from Haiti or Voodoo from New Orleans, which would have warranted naming it a Voodoo cult.⁷² The use of such a term, whether intentional or unintentional, did not have benign effects and it certainly did not assist in facilitating proper understanding of the Nation.

According to Danielle Boaz, the term "Voodoo" was used in the U.S. media to convey the inferiority of Black religion, demonstrate Black people's propensity for savagery and delegitimize any religious belief or practice" rooted in African religious traditions.⁷³ By evoking the term "Voodoo," Beynon actually placed the Nation within a

⁶⁸ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (1994).

⁶⁹ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism* (1962).

⁷⁰ Danielle Boaz, “The Voodoo Cult of Detroit,” 26.

⁷¹ Erdmann Beynon, *The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit*, 894, n.2.

⁷² Danielle N. Boaz, "Dividing Stereotype and Religion," 270–71.

⁷³ Danielle N. Boaz, "Dividing Stereotype and Religion," 273–74.

frame and a category that was used to induce social ridicule, marginalization, and even charges of insanity.⁷⁴ This was a deliberate attempt to associate the Nation with all things horrific and evil—murder, cannibalism, and satanic worship, none of which actually pertain to African religious traditions in the Caribbean and the United States.⁷⁵ Boaz also points out that “(w)hile the U.S. media and authorities had often accused African Americans of retaining ‘superstitious’ beliefs and practices related to the use of charms and medico-religious healing, Robert Harris’s sacrificial murder in 1932 would be the first time that blacks in the United States were suspected of belonging to a religious organization centered on human sacrifice.”⁷⁶ But was the Nation of Islam actually associated with human sacrifice? Within the Muslims lessons there was (and is) a particular question-answer, and this was used to make a tenuous connection with human sacrifice:

Question 10. – Why does Muhammad and any Muslim murder the devil? What is the Duty of each Muslim in regard to four devils? What Reward does a Muslim receive by presenting the four devils at one time?

ANS. – Because he is One Hundred Percent wicked and will not keep and obey the Laws of Islam.

His ways and actions are like a snake of the grafted type.

So Muhammad learned that he could not reform the devils, so they had to be murdered.

All Muslims will murder the devil because they know he is a snake and, also, if he be allowed to live, he would sting someone else.

Each Muslim is required to bring four devils.

And by bringing and presenting four at one time, his Reward is a button to wear on the lapel of his coat.

Also, a free transportation in the Holy City (Mecca) to see Brother Muhammad.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Danielle N. Boaz, "Dividing Stereotype and Religion," 254. It has to be further noted that with these associations, there is a call to action that includes, but is not limited to “ridicule,” “rejection,” “avoidance,” “dismissal,” “disregard,” “attack,” “destruction” and “murder.”

⁷⁵ Danielle N. Boaz, "Dividing Stereotype and Religion," 268.

⁷⁶ Danielle N. Boaz, "The Voodoo Cult of Detroit," 18.

⁷⁷ Fard Muhammad, "Lost-Found Muslim Lesson No. 1," in *The Supreme Wisdom Lessons* (Chicago: The Final Call, 1995), 13.

Beynon asserted that W.D. Fard “taught explicitly that it was the duty of every Moslem to offer as sacrifice four Caucasian devils in order that he might return to his home in Mecca,” and yet, the Harris and the McQueen incidents do not reflect this teaching, even in their most extreme literal understanding. It cannot be overlooked that “Smith and the McQueen family were all African Americans who, at least according to media reports, were Temple Members. As neither whites nor African American non-believers, it is unclear how their deaths would further Fard’s purported teachings about murdering *white devils*. This is particularly true in the case of James Smith who, according to Robert Harris’s confession, was so devout that he offered himself as a sacrifice to Allah.”⁷⁸ According to initial reports, Harris claimed that he was fulfilling a 1500 year old prophecy and that the sacrifice had to be a stranger, a non-member of the Order of Islam, placed on an altar, and stabbed through the heart.⁷⁹ Later, he admitted that Smith was in fact a member of the cult and was initially reluctant but soon relented once Harris “showed him that he would be savior of the world and go to heaven right away.”⁸⁰ None of this, however, actually corresponded to anything found in the Nation of Islam’s teachings or literature. It was reported that the police discovered in the Harris home a magazine opened to a story of desert mysticism with an underlined clause: “the believer must be stabbed through the heart.”⁸¹ It would have made sense to interrogate this lead in order to determine the actual basis of the ritualistic killing perpetrated by Harris, but this very important source was cast aside as a “cheap magazine,”⁸² and the

⁷⁸ Danielle Boaz, “The Voodoo Cult of Detroit: Race,” 29.

⁷⁹ “Leader of Cult Admits Slaying at Home Altar,” *Detroit Free Press*, 1.

⁸⁰ “Voodoo Slayer Admits Plotting Death of Judges,” *Detroit Free Press*, 3.

⁸¹ “Leader of Cult Admits Slaying at Home Altar,” *Detroit Free Press*, 1.

⁸² “Leader of Cult Admits Slaying at Home Altar,” *Detroit Free Press*, 1.

same can be said of the McQueen case. There was nothing within the Nation's teaching that would encourage the boiling of anyone, much less one's family.

By giving the Voodoo framing full assent, Beynon's piece actually extended the media's assault on the Nation's religious import and value. Boaz, taking the popular negative framing of African American religiosity at that time into consideration, asserts that "(l)inking this organization and its leader to human sacrifice would have been a particularly effective manner of discrediting them in the 1930's."⁸³ Again, whether intentionally or unintentionally, Beynon seems to have perpetuated an image of the Nation that was a gross misrepresentation that resulted in aversions to true engagement of the Nation. While the Voodoo framing may have been effective at marginalizing the Nation and making it an easy target for what amounted to a modern-day witch hunt, this was not the only framing leveled against the Nation of Islam prior to *The Hate That Hate Produced*.

2.4 Framing the Nation as Pseudo-Religion: Hatim Sahib and Hetero-Orthodox Judgment

The master's thesis of Hatim Sahib, entitled "The Nation of Islam," like Beynon's work, provided very important information and insights about the Nation of Islam in its relatively early years. He did an effective job of tracing the early history and growth of the movement in Detroit and Chicago, including its schisms, conflicts, and persecutions.⁸⁴ This piece also provided detailed profiles of the followers: their educational, organizational, and religious backgrounds; roles and functions within the

⁸³ Danielle Boaz, "The Voodoo Cult of Detroit," 24.

⁸⁴ Hatim A. Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," *Contributions in Black Studies* 13/14 (1995/1996): 48–160, ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst.

organization; and the various personal socio-economic vicissitudes that many of them had faced prior to and while being members of the Nation.⁸⁵ Furthermore, it elucidated some of the more obscure nuances of the NOI, like the relationship between Elijah Muhammad and his teacher, W.D. Fard.

Sahib's work captured the depth and tremendous impact that Elijah Muhammad's encounter with W.D. Fard had on the former's life and the subsequent development of the NOI. For instance, he was able to observe that the "confidence of the apostle [Elijah Muhammad] in Fard is really of exceptional character."⁸⁶ His inclusion of extended interview responses from Elijah Muhammad proved to be of immense import and value.⁸⁷

Interestingly, Sahib does not succumb to the Voodoo framing, and he actually presents that particular chapter of the Nation's history in a relatively fair and balanced manner. He even went so far as to depict it as being a part of the Nation's persecution. He summarized it as follows:

One of the Negroes in Detroit by the name of Harris had murdered one of his roomers because he did not pay the rent. The groups opposing the movement charged that Harris was one of the followers and that he did what he had done because of the new belief. Although Harris was not one of the followers, the case was exploited and the rumor spread that these people believed in offering human sacrifice. Against this rumor W.D. Fard announced in the *Detroit Times* that Harris was not a follower and that the teachings of Islam do not teach human sacrifice. This rumor was of very far-reaching effect in handicapping the growth of the movement and in creating internal clashes and serious conflicts among various members of the group.⁸⁸

It must be noted that the *Voodoo cult* framing witnessed in Beynon's work did not find expression in Sahib's work. This was very likely due to the fact that Sahib had another

⁸⁵ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 77–86.

⁸⁶ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 69.

⁸⁷ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 72.

⁸⁸ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 64.

set of contentious issues that would set his work apart regarding such violent framings. Sahib's personal religious and cultural commitments appear to shape his reading of the Nation's worldview and religious teachings at several points in the thesis. As an Arab Iraqi Muslim, more informed by his own cultural and religious context(s), Sahib seemed to have experienced difficulty maintaining objectivity, especially in the face of the Nation's religious *otherness* and its socio-political stance in response to racial oppression. The framing that Sahib cloaks the Nation with is one of *religious deviance*, which was supported by the framing of *ignorance* and *hostility*. Sahib proclaimed:

Being poor, underprivileged, and ignorant, these members are not able to comprehend abstract thoughts or to develop them to a high level. Moreover, the history of the movement shows us that the cult has developed originally along emotional lines, not along intellectual or purely religious careers. Hence its ideology was mythical and crude, and so was its symbolism, which is highly charged with emotions and feelings.⁸⁹

It is not clear what Sahib meant by “emotional lines” or “intellectual or purely religious careers,” but it is clear that Sahib attempted to dismiss the Nation on grounds that it traded religious substance for extreme emotionalism and incoherent symbolism. The one emotional disposition that defined this group and served as its lifeblood, according to Sahib, was its hostility.

Sahib began his chapter entitled “Peculiar Organizational Features” with the following statement: “The first essential characteristic of this cult is that of being very aggressive and hostile toward the Caucasian race. This hostility, perhaps, has played a very important role in the development of the cult and in its unity.”⁹⁰ Faith and sincere religious piety were not even a remote possibility for explaining this objectively apparent

⁸⁹ Sahib, “The Nation of Islam,” 88.

⁹⁰ Sahib, “The Nation of Islam,” 87.

unity among the believers. Sahib went as far as to include the induction process within his pejorative framing, and he later proclaimed that the “period of induction and later through his participation in the movement the convert develops deep hostility toward the white people.”⁹¹ Such a claim implies that induction into and sustained participation in the NOI, if it was not the causative factor, was definitely the primary factor for the perceived hostility against whites witnessed among the believers.⁹² Sahib identified hostility as “the central theme and axis of the teachings”⁹³ and it is this hostility that was the alleged glue that fostered the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood among members. He stated:

Their hostility to the white race functions as the basic factor in their cohesion. To represent the white man as the greatest enemy— the devil, the wicked, the one who killed their first ancestors brought to America, the one who robbed the race of its virtues, of its religion and language, the one who enslaved the race for four centuries during which he had kept the race "blind and dead mentally"— is another mechanism which provides the group with strong unity and high morale and maintains the charge of emotional attachment.⁹⁴

Sahib demonstrated a considerable degree of condescension in his treatment of the NOI, especially when dealing with particular aspects of its theology and religious substance, which was obviously too unorthodox or heretical for Sahib’s religious and cultural orientations. Furthermore, he was unable to include in his perception the glaring opportunity and spacing for hospitality and love that was burgeoning among this small

⁹¹ Sahib, “The Nation of Islam,” 140.

⁹² It should be noted that Sahib does not qualify his statement to be relegated to some; he does seem to make some hasty, sweeping generalizations, and thus present a generalized distortion of the members of the NOI.

⁹³ Sahib, “The Nation of Islam,” 142.

⁹⁴ Sahib, “The Nation of Islam,” 143.

group of poor Black people who lived in a world that was hostile, inhospitable, and loveless to them.

This impossibility was conditioned by the fact that he generally viewed the NOI Muslims as grossly ignorant and uninformed. He asserted:

Their knowledge of Christianity and the Bible is not much better than their knowledge of Islam and the Koran. In fact, they are ignorant in both. My observation reveals that the best of these followers might know two or three verses of the Bible, but even these few verses they do not understand. Moreover, each of them has a great doubt about the significance of the church in his life.⁹⁵

Not only was their religious ignorance to be found in knowledge of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but it was also to be found in their knowledge of Islam as well. There seemed to have been a particular disdain for Elijah Muhammad's and the Nation's appropriation of Islam to address their "ethnicized" needs. Sahib exclaimed:

In fact, the cult is so far from the ideology and beliefs of Islam due to the fact that the cult is not essentially a religious group, but a protest group. They have acquired some of the aspects of Islam after they have ethnicized some of them and distorted the others to fit their mythical beliefs and ideology.⁹⁶

For Sahib, the Nation was not even to be considered religious; rather, it was to be considered a protest movement.⁹⁷ To drive this point, he listed all of the key features of the NOI's theology, without explanation or qualification that made the Nation religiously deficient:

Allah is Mr. W. D. Fard; Prophet Mohammed did not originate Islam because Islam was before him, it was the religion of the original man; Allah is not able to resurrect people after death because this is "something no one can do"; Prophet Mohammed is not the last of the prophets because this does not leave a place for the prophecy of Elijah; the Koran was not revealed to Prophet Mohammed, but it was known before him; it was not

⁹⁵ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 79.

⁹⁶ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 88.

⁹⁷ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 94.

given by Allah, but it is like the Bible and the Pentateuch and was written by a group of scientists (23 scientists) 15,000 years before the appearance of Prophet Mohammed. These are some of their beliefs concerning the God of Islam, the Holy Book of Islam, and the Prophet of Islam.⁹⁸

This amalgamation of unrelated theological features does not give one a clear insight into the object of his study. One is left wondering what is the NOI's stance and explanation for each of these points. Quite frankly, each one of these features could have served as a basis for very fascinating inquiry and discourse; but the point of the presentation does not appear to have been to explore, interrogate, or understand, but rather to caricature and dismiss the Nation as a religious deviant.

The Nation's heterodoxy and *otherness* apparently proved too much for Sahib's personal religious tastes. He continued his religious evaluation with a new focus on the Nation's religious practices:

In fact, there is not any Islamic feature that yet has been institutionalized except the reciting of the first chapter of the Koran, which constitutes part of the Islamic prayer. All the other features introduced in their institutionalized behavior have been distorted or disfigured completely. They do fast, but not during Ramadan or according to Islamic rules; they pray, but not the Islamic prayer, and not even like the Moslems, who pray five times a day. They offer their so-called prayer whenever they meet in the temple or they have to eat. They do not practice "Al-Zakat," but they have replaced this by carrying the principle of donation from the church, as I remarked before.⁹⁹

Sahib then goes on to directly criticize the Nation's construction of the sacred (which, up to that point, had remained a bit obscured), their orientation toward the sacred, and their prayer practice:

Most of these symbols became sacred not because of their divine origins. In fact, none of them, except the National, which was created by Fard himself, have such an origin as long as Fard is regarded as Allah. The temple, for example, is a sacred place not because it is, as in Islam, for

⁹⁸ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 88.

⁹⁹ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 88–89.

example, a place of praying, but because it expresses and stands for identification of the group as belonging together. Actually, if this group prays in the temple their praying is not, as in Islam, the essential cause for their attending the temple, but is something incidental; it consists only of around ten verses recited collectively by the group whenever they meet, and then they continue their program of agitation or teaching. This, in turn, deepens the sense of belonging together and entrenches the mutual responsiveness among the attendants, who, after a while, find themselves involved in a very highly emotionally charged collective atmosphere which operates to break down their individuality and their criticisms, and to increase their susceptibility to suggestion and responsiveness.¹⁰⁰

Sahib also took issue with the Nation's hermeneutics and exegesis, which seemed absurd given his earlier statement about how few Bible verses the believers of the group actually knew. His judgement about the invalidity of the Nation's interpretations and appropriations of scriptures was equally scathing. He declared:

This judgment about the validity of the pretensions of the movement is easily reached by reading some verses in the Bible, viewing their meaning symbolically according to the particular perspective offered by the movement. For example, they refer to Genesis 17:8, "And I will give unto thee to thy seed after thee the land of thy sojournings," as proving that Allah promised them to give them the inheritance of the world. Another example is that referring to the verse, "Blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah and the people whom He has chosen for his own inheritance" [Ps 33: 12], to prove their claim that they are themselves the chosen people meant in this verse. To have the name of the God as Jehovah in the verse, and not of Fard, is not of so much importance as long as the Bible refers to, and indicates, these things symbolically. To add more evidence for their pretension that they are the chosen people, they declare that the chosen people have been described and characterized in the Bible in Matthew 5:11–12 as follows: "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets before you." Who is the dirty nigger? Who is more persecuted than us in the world? Who is the coon, the mentally dead, the enslaved...? It is you and me whom have been meant in the Bible.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 94.

¹⁰¹ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 92–93.

It is not clear if Sahib himself was a literalist, but it seems odd that he would find fault with the NOI using the Bible to support its beliefs and to make rational appeals based on their particular hermeneutical stratagem and exegeses.¹⁰² It is almost as if the fact that the NOI believers' adherence to their particular beliefs automatically constituted their ignorance and warranted a judgmental evaluation based on, not the content of their arguments, but the fact that what was being purported was too drastically *other*. The problem was that these areas could have served as potential openings for discourse and dialogue, but instead they were used to justify dismissing, judging, and criticizing the Nation.

What we witnessed with Sahib is what we will call *hetero-orthodox framing*. Just as we saw previously with journalists, once the subject is placed in the sphere of *deviance*, the scholar abandons their objectivity and focuses more on their "role of exposing, condemning, or excluding from the public agenda those who violate or challenge consensus values, and uphold the consensus distinction between legitimate and illegitimate political [and/or religious] activity."¹⁰³ The instances were so numerous within Sahib's original thesis that the editors placed a note of caution and acknowledgement of this double tendency on Sahib's part, and even provided a statement to address his blatant biases and prejudices:

Today studies of politico-religious groups such as the NOI tend to be carried out in a far less judgmental manner than were similar investigations by social scientists in the early 1950s. The term "cult," for

¹⁰² It would take 47 years for scholars to recognize that Elijah Muhammad was a bona fide interpreter and exegete of the Holy Qur'an. See Herbert Berg, "Elijah Muhammad: An African American Muslim Mufassir?" *Arabica* 45, no. 3 (1998): 320–46, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4057315>.

¹⁰³ Daniel Hallin, *We Keep America on Top of the World: Television Journalism and the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 1994), 54. Hallin's statement is, nevertheless, too limiting in terms of the scope of this tendency—more than the political categories are at stake. Furthermore, it is not forthcoming in regard to the malevolent and violent nature of these mechanisms and their capacity to garner their forces and sentence "deviant others" to proverbial and literal death.

example, while continuing to bear valid sociological meaning, it would simply not be used today because of its strong negative connotations. As a Muslim, Sahib seems to have been generally appalled not only by the lack of knowledge of Islam among NOI converts, but by their apparent ignorance of Christianity as well. He was therefore led to conclude that religion was a negligible factor in the organization's functioning compared to the role of secular protest. However, just because NOI theology manifested rough-hewn edges at this stage of the organization's development did not mean that religious sentiment was peripheral to its worldview, as evidence clearly attests a decade later.¹⁰⁴

Some of these methodological failings may be determined by pre-methodological dispositions that plague the Western tradition when dealing with marginalized groups. These methodological failings and the respective pre-methodological considerations will be explored in Chapter 4.

2.5 Framing the Nation as Black Nationalism: Lincoln, Essien-Udom, and the Sociological Reduction

The Black Muslims in America by C. Eric Lincoln provided a piercing sociological analysis of the Nation, situating it within the socio-historical context of America.¹⁰⁵ It was comprehensive in its breadth, covering the socio-historical backdrop, the internal doctrines, organizational structures, its internal/external tensions, and its religious legitimacy. This classic text provided an insightful sociological perspective on the Nation of Islam, but it still reinforced the framework of “black supremacy and white degradation.”¹⁰⁶ Even when identifying the Nation’s unification factors as a mass movement, Lincoln overemphasized the role of hatred and gave no attention to other likely factors (e.g. religious piety, love, and hospitality) as even being remotely possible

¹⁰⁴ Sahib, “The Nation of Islam,” 52.

¹⁰⁵ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).

¹⁰⁶ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 72.

for the unity among Muslims.¹⁰⁷ This tendency could be attributed to the influence of the “hetero-orthodox” frame, which brings to bear the naive ideological presumption of Islam’s race-blind purity. This tendency in Lincoln’s work was explicitly addressed by Richard Turner:

Clearly, in Lincoln’s signification, the Nation of Islam was not a religion but rather a social protest movement because of its focus on race issues. His work, especially *The Black Muslims in America*, completed the construction of “the myth or a race-blind Islam” which began with the work of Edward W. Blyden in the nineteenth century. “The myth of a race-blind Islam” refers to a discourse and an intellectual tradition that have created and perpetuated ahistorical and sensationalist representations of Islam and black nationalism.¹⁰⁸

Lincoln does acknowledge Elijah Muhammad’s response to the charge of teaching hate, but as with *The Hate That Hate Produced*, the narrative of hatred continued unchallenged as if it were an established fact.¹⁰⁹

Essien-Udom’s work, published a year after Lincoln’s, provided a keen view of the Nation in terms of its organizational structures, doctrinal nuances, and religious dynamics.¹¹⁰ Like Lincoln’s work, E. U. Essien-Udom’s *Black Nationalism* provided another very important study of the Nation of Islam. He presented the Nation as a nationalistic religious organization with an eschatologically driven worldview and theology, as he clearly stated:

... an esoteric, in-group struggle to provide standards by which social, cultural, and moral life of the Negro masses can be raised to a meaningful community fabric... The movement combines the attractions of religion, nationalism, and political “pies in the sky” with a peculiar sense of belonging and achievement, and proposes the possibility of “greater”

¹⁰⁷ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 101. This was also a tendency of Hatim Sahib’s work as well.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 200.

¹⁰⁹ Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 208–9.

¹¹⁰ See Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*. This foundational text provides a complex and intimate view into the NOI during the time of the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad’s leadership.

achievement for its members... Religious and nationalistic symbols, combined with a mutilated version of western eschatology, endow the practical and moral concerns of the members with meaning and a strong sense of purpose and destiny.¹¹¹

Essien-Udom's work is valuable, but it relied too heavily upon the nationalist framework, which makes it difficult to recognize the religious import and nuances of the Nation of Islam. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad said in response to questions about Essien Udom's book: "Well, he has some good in there, and I could also classify him with the hasty writer. He's too hasty in what he wants to write, and probably would write correctly, but he wants to hurry and get that on the market."¹¹² It is apparent that Elijah Muhammad felt that patience was needed to understand the Nation. Later, when asked if anyone had written a good, fair, reasonably correct report on the Nation, and asked about Lincoln's work in conjunction with Essien-Udom's, Elijah Muhammad responded: "Yes sir. They both have very good things in it, and they have things in it, in their writing, that show undeveloped knowledge of just what's what— that I don't detest, so I just classify it as people who want to write."¹¹³ It seems that Elijah Muhammad did not perceive these authors and their works as an authentic engagement of the Nation.

The emphasis on the Nation's nationalism is a tempting reductionism that repeatedly contributed to the constructed, distorted image of the Nation. These distortions have been given assent, and consequently, many have mistaken these for being authentic representations. Minister Abdul Allah Muhammad compared the failed attempts to locate the Nation's power source to the failed attempts of Delilah to locate the source of Samson's power in the biblical narrative (Judges 16). He contended:

¹¹¹ Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, 336–37.

¹¹² Elijah Muhammad, *The Nation of Islam* (Atlanta, GA: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 1995), 44.

¹¹³ Elijah Muhammad, *The Nation of Islam*, 45.

But look what happened. The spies in our midst went back and told their masters that the key— secret to the strength of the Nation of Islam— was their rabid Black nationalism. [They say that] they were projecting this nationalistic image that just excited the breast of Black men and women. That was the key. That’s what made them so strong... But they found out like Delilah: it wasn’t our Black Nationalism. You can take the Black Nationalism and go on about your business.¹¹⁴

Lincoln’s and Essien-Udom’s works, despite the distractions and reductionism of their nationalistic framings, nevertheless, remain critical to NOI studies.

2.6 Framing the Nation as Transition: From Black Muslims to Muslims

Another frame that seems to rest on the previous perspectives of the NOI as a hostile religious deviant and a Black racist nationalist organization is the view of the Nation as a separatist group evolving into an orthodox Islamic movement. This narrative rests on the presumption that Islamic orthodoxy is historically monolithic, devoid of divergent beliefs and is the exemplar of true Islam.¹¹⁵ This narrative evinces that the departure of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad on February 26, 1975, and the succession of his son, Wallace D. Muhammad, marked the emergence of a new stage of the Nation’s evolutionary development. Interlacing an organizational model from Joseph H. Gusfield’s work,¹¹⁶ Marsh explained:

Wallace D. Muhammad succeeded his father as leader of the Nation of Islam. He changed its name to the World Community of Al-Islam in the West. The Name change is more than symbolic; it reflects an alteration in structure, doctrine, rituals, leadership, and goals. The traditionalization stage under Wallace D. Muhammad is a “diffusion of goals, in which a pragmatic leadership replaces unattainable goals.” This stage is “always in the direction of greater conservatism.” The leadership during this stage usually revises the goals to accommodate the dominant group. Elijah

¹¹⁴ Abdul Allah Muhammad, “Samson,” September 4, 1988, Chicago, IL, The Final Call Administration Building, Cassette 1 of 1, side 2.

¹¹⁵ See Wesley Muhammad, “Black Muslim Theology and the Classical Islamic Tradition: Possibilities of a Rapprochement,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 25, no. 4 (2008): 61–89.

¹¹⁶ Joseph R. Gusfield, *Protest, Reform, and Revolt* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1970), 110.

Muhammad wanted to establish a nation within a nation, although this is almost impossible to attain in the United States. Wallace Muhammad is trying to achieve more realistic goals, such as ideological reform (within the organization), restoration of urban areas through employment, and trade with Islamic governments.¹¹⁷

The name change was more than surface symbolism; it was a complete transformation of the Nation of Islam. This “traditionalization” stage was an attempt to completely move the Nation to a more acceptable Islamic orthodoxy with more realistic and practical socio-economic and political goals.

Less apparent was the devaluing of the more problematic religious experience of Elijah Muhammad, specifically his claim that Allah came in the person of W.D. Fard.¹¹⁸ This was the central claim upon which Elijah Muhammad never equivocated. Wallace Muhammad almost immediately deconstructed and demythologized his father’s religious experiences and teachings, and as a result, he was viewed as having more religious piety and legitimacy. Marsh argued:

Whether one agrees or not with the changes Wallace D. Muhammad has made, he had the right to change. Members of the organization say Elijah Muhammad himself accepted the changes as the fulfillment of his own mission. Wallace is a deeply religious man, devoted to the cause of Islam. He is guided by his knowledge of the Koran and belief in Allah. Whether the WCIW will prosper or not is too early to predict. History will record their achievements and generations yet born will judge their contribution. However, there are two facts that cannot be debated: it is no longer a black separatist movement nor are its members Black Muslims. The World Community of Al-Islam in the West is comprised of Muslims who believe in Islam. The transition from Black Muslims to Muslims is complete.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Resurrection, Transformation, and Change of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America, 1930–1995*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 13.

¹¹⁸ This belief was published as “What the Muslims Believe” on the back page of the *Muhammad Speaks* Newspaper (and later on the back page of the *Final Call* Newspaper): “WE BELIEVE that Allah (God) appeared in the Person of Master W. Fard Muhammad, July, 1930; the long-awaited “Messiah” of the Christians and the “Mahdi” of the Muslims.”

¹¹⁹ Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930–1980*, 1st ed. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984), 104.

Why grant Wallace Muhammad the presumption of sincere religious piety? Can the same be said of his father, Elijah Muhammad? Marsh's acritical assessment of Wallace Muhammad's alteration of the NOI seemed to signify more of a sigh of relief that those aspects of the organization's beliefs and structures that were problematic to the dominant society were finally eradicated. The death of the Nation did not register as worthy of mourning. From this frame of the Nation as a religious group in "transition from Separatism to Islam" it appeared that the fate of the Nation had been sealed, but something unexpected happened. Marsh further reported:

Elijah Muhammad carried the red, black, and green flag for forty-five years. In 1975, after Elijah Muhammad's death, Imam W. D. Muhammad dismantled the Nation of Islam. In 1977, Minister Louis Farrakhan left the World Community of Al-Islam in the West and resurrected the Nation of Islam. Without Minister Farrakhan blowing his hot, passionate breath into the lungs of the "Nation," it would have died a slow, quiet death. Minister Farrakhan rose from the ashes of the Nation of Islam and willed the "Black Muslims" back to life.¹²⁰

This new perspective allowed Marsh to not only re-frame his narrative about the Nation of Islam but also helped him revise the one he had developed about W.D. Muhammad's work as well. Marsh admitted:

After a thorough analysis of the data for the second edition, I realized it would be appropriate and scientifically sound to rename the title of the book. The first edition was entitled *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The transition from separatism to Islam, 1930–1980...* From 1975 until 1980 Imam W. D. Muhammad began to dismantle and dissolve his father's "nation." Therefore, the first edition covered the transition from black nationalism under the leadership of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad to the "orthodoxing," early dissolution and *non-Afrocentric/anti-nation building perspective* of Imam W. D. Muhammad [Emphasis mine]. The second edition details the resurrection, transformation, and change of the Nation of Islam from 1980 to 1995. In fifteen years, the organization

¹²⁰ Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Resurrection, Transformation, and Change of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America, 1930–1995*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), x. It must be noted that Clifton Marsh, while not altering too much from the second edition, republished this book under the title *The Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America* (2000).

originally known as the Lost-Found Nation of Islam has undergone radical changes. In the second edition, I included the term “resurrection.” Clearly, in 1979 no one could have predicted the enormous charismatic power of Minister Louis Farrakhan.¹²¹

Was Minister Farrakhan’s rebuilding the Nation of Islam based on the teachings of the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad eligible for the same kind of laudatory assessment that W.D. Muhammad received? Would his efforts be associated with sincere religious piety?

2.7 Framing the Nation as Rage: Farrakhan, Time, and the Million Man March

On the cover of the February 28, 1994, edition of *Time* magazine there is a darkened, sinister-looking, photo-realistic drawing of the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan’s face – the current *face* of the Nation of Islam.¹²² Accompanying this darkened *visage* are the emboldened words: “Ministry of Rage.” To further explicate this title the subtitle follows: “Louis Farrakhan spews racist venom at Jews and all of white America. Why do so many blacks say he *speaks* for them?” (Emphasis mine) This representation is actually quite revealing because it styles the Minister as one whose work and messages are imbued with uncontrollable rage and that the victims of his rage are unsuspecting Jews and white Americans. Naturally, one would inquire after the anomalous occurrence of having so many Black people – mostly Christians – following and listen to such a rage-filled leader. The widespread support of Minister Farrakhan from African Americans and the perception of his message seems to have made Minister Farrakhan’s appearance on *Time* magazine significant. Robert Singh had to admit that

¹²¹ Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Resurrection, Transformation, and Change of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America*, 153.

¹²² “Ministry of Rage: Louis Farrakhan Spews Racist Venom at Jews and All of White America. Why Do So Many Blacks Say He Speaks for Them?” *Time*, February 28, 1994, cover page.

“Farrakhan’s face on the cover of *Time* magazine in February 1994 would in itself have been unremarkable, and impossible, were it not for the combination of the reactionary and paranoid content of his discourse and its evident popular appeal among black Americans at large.”¹²³

Does Minister Farrakhan correspond to the framing that the media has employed for him (and the Nation of Islam in general)? Does the Minister fit quietly and neatly into categories established by the powers-that-be, and why does he seem to escape the borders of these frames, not by any slight-of-hand but with a *logic* that frustrates the media machinery? To demonstrate this tendency, the following is Minister Farrakhan’s response to *Time* magazine’s cover story at one of the Nation of Islam’s annual Saviours’ Day event. He retorted:

Then, what is it, this 'ministry of rage'? So, I consulted my dictionary, 'cause I wanted to be sure that I understood what this 'ministry of rage' was all about. Now, according to the dictionary... rage is fury, violent venom... fury, violent speech... rage, uncontrolled anger... Is this the ministry of Louis Farrakhan? Would you tell me please, can violent speech, filled with acrimony and animosity and apoplexy and bitterness... can that kind of speech transform human life? The words that Farrakhan speaks goes into the prisons and takes hardened criminals and softens their heart to the Word of God and changes their life around. The words that I speak will take a drunkard and make him throw down his alcohol, take a chain smoker and make them throw down their cigarettes, take a drug user and make him throw away, or her throw away the drugs, take a wife beater and make him stop beating his wife, take a man that has no respect for family values, clean him up and make him want to be a respected husband and a respected father and a respecter of his women. This is not a 'ministry of rage,' this is a ministry of love and a ministry of divine truth.¹²⁴

¹²³ Robert Singh, *The Farrakhan Phenomenon: Race, Reaction, and the Paranoid Style in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997), 219.

¹²⁴ Louis Farrakhan, “The Guide and the Guidance for These Troubles Times,” *Saviours' Day 1994*, University of Illinois at Chicago Pavilion, Chicago, IL, February 27, 1994, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuIqGl4uW6I>, accessed February 2, 2015, 18:26–21:05.

Again, we see the reassertion of the counter-frame, which is the *modus operandi* of the Nation of Islam. It has consistently challenged the representation and images of itself that have been produced via various framing attempts; and this, coupled with its work in the community, has earned the Nation the social capital to have a counter-impact on Black people. This is precisely why the majority of Black people did not, according to *Time* magazine, see the Minister and the Nation of Islam as the media had attempted to frame them.¹²⁵

For Black people in America, the Minister represents a promise, but for others, he appears to represent a problem. This problematic was explicitly stated as a universal problem – one that is shared by virtually everyone:

Louis Farrakhan is a problem... He is a problem for the Rev. Benjamin Chavis of the N.A.A.C.P. and Abraham Foxman of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith... He is a problem for the Congressional Black Caucus... He is a problem for a broad range of American Blacks... He is a problem for American Jews... He is a problem for the vast majority of Islamic Americans... He is a problem for some of his adherents... Above all, he is a problem for an America that is increasingly multiracial and multicultural and is consequently in growing need of tolerance and mutual respect.¹²⁶

What is not expressed in the above quote, or in the entire body of the *Time* magazine article, is the recognition and respect of the Minister's representation as hope and *promise*. In fact, it is his representation as *promise* that is inextricably bound to his being seen as a problem. It could very well be that the Minister and the Nation of Islam represent a *promised* problem or a problematic *promise*. Nevertheless, the problematic, as it relates to Minister Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam, seems to garner the most

¹²⁵ William A. Henry III, "Pride and Prejudice: He Inspires African Americans, but Why Does America's Most Controversial Minister Poison His Message with Racist Hatred?" *Time*, February 28, 1994, 22.

¹²⁶ Henry III, "Pride and Prejudice," 21.

attention in the media. This perspective that has led to the type of question raised in the *Time* magazine cover story, and perhaps in general: “He [Farrakhan] inspires African Americans, but why does America’s most controversial minister poison his message with racist hatred?”¹²⁷

This obviously loaded framing affirms the power of the Minister to *inspire*, but it also attaches the defining frame of *racist hatred*. The point of contention is this poison—“racist hatred.” On the surface, the charge seems to be a bit of an absurdity—how could a message laced with “racist hatred” inspire the masses of African Americans? Are African Americans in general prone to be inspired by racist hatred? Is there a history (or are there histories) that would support such a view? Does the history of the Nation of Islam support such a view? Perhaps it would be advantageous to call into question the label “racist hatred” itself, especially in the face of its explicit incongruences.

While Minister Farrakhan’s capacity to inspire is very apparent, the “racist hatred” does not arrive with the same certainty as the former. This should be sufficient to at least justify a re-examination of the framing. Nevertheless, the charge of racist hatred cannot be easily dismissed, but it should not be put forth as an absolute signifier, nor should it be held beyond discourse. This is pertinent because its imposition comes with the force and power of the media to shape perception. This imbroglio, beyond an aversive *warning* sign, should be an invitation to a deeper examination of Minister Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam, but, as Singh has pointed out, “(d)irect and full engagement is otherwise subsumed by wholesale avoidance, when a combative, candid dialogue and an analysis of the real sources of Farrakhan’s mass appeal seems of cardinal importance.”¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Henry III, “Pride and Prejudice,” 21.

¹²⁸ Singh, *The Farrakhan Phenomenon*, 219.

This act of framing by the media attempts to impose a particular identity onto the Minister, one that has been vigorously rejected. Minister Farrakhan has explicitly understood himself to be a proponent of a message and a teaching that has been a healing for Black people.¹²⁹ Furthermore, he recognizes that he has “emerged as the voice that speaks to the hurt” of Black people.¹³⁰ This counter-framing presents a challenge to the image that the media has constructed and has identified with the Minister. What this brings to light is the power of the media, as an institution, to impose its categories that have a direct bearing on how individuals, groups, and organizations perceive themselves and are perceived by others. Pierre Bourdieu makes this point in his *Language and Symbolic Power*:

The act of institution is thus an act of communication, but of a particular kind: it *signifies* to someone what his identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to him and imposes it on him by expressing it in front of everyone (*kategorieren*, meaning originally, to accuse publicly) and thus informing him in an authoritative manner of what he is and what he must be. This is clearly evident in the insult, a kind of curse (*sacer* also signifies cursed) which attempts to imprison its victim in an accusation which also depicts his destiny.¹³¹

While the media does wield this power, there is the capacity to resist the media’s significations. Examples of this can be witnessed among the majority of Black people who reportedly did not, according to *Time* magazine, see the Minister and the Nation of Islam as the media had attempted to frame them. According to the poll accompanying the *Time* magazine cover story, seventy percent (70%) of those polled thought that Minister Farrakhan was someone who said things that the country should hear, sixty-seven percent

¹²⁹ See Louis Farrakhan, “The Power of God to Heal the Black Man and Woman of America.” Lecture, Mosque Maryam, Chicago, IL, October 13, 1991.

¹³⁰ Louis Farrakhan, “They Suck the Life from You,” interviewed by Sylvester Monroe, *Time*, February 28, 1994, 25.

¹³¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 121.

(67%) saw him as an effective leader, sixty-two percent (62%) saw him as being good for the Black community, fifty-three percent (53%) saw him as a role model for Black youth, and sixty-three percent (63%) saw him as someone who speaks the truth.¹³² Only thirty-four (34%) percent saw him as a bigot and a racist.¹³³

On October 16, 1995, a little more than a year after the *Time* magazine cover story, Minister Farrakhan led one of the largest gatherings of African Americans in U.S. history. How could a leader who had been deemed a teacher of racist hatred make a successful call to Black men throughout the U.S. using the themes of atonement and responsibility? Not surprisingly, the media coverage leading up to the Million Man March definitely was employing the framing of deviance. This, of course, led to ostensible examples of the media abandoning its conventional position of “detachment, balance, and objectivity,” and behaving more like boundary-maintaining agents.¹³⁴

Watkins pointed out this tendency in one news report in particular:

In this particular frame the reporter used value laden terms to color his depiction of Farrakhan. For example, at one point in the report he referred to Farrakhan as “the man some have labeled the pied-piper of hate.” Later, he described him as “an outlaw with a small following.” The selection of words and catch phrases highlight the framing choices journalists used to mark Farrakhan’s newsworthiness in deviant terms.¹³⁵

This kind of intentional framing is both complex and sophisticated. In fact, the media coverage leading up to the Million Man March had three distinct thematic threads. S.

Craig Watkins observed:

First, the emphasis on Louis Farrakhan and the marking of what was framed as black racism. Second, the extent to which journalists labored to

¹³² Henry III, “Pride and Prejudice,” 22.

¹³³ Henry III, “Pride and Prejudice,” 22.

¹³⁴ S. Craig Watkins, “Framing Protest: News Media Frames of the Million Man March,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18, no. 1 (March 2001): 94.

¹³⁵ Watkins, “Framing Protest,” 94.

differentiate legitimate African American leadership from illegitimate African American leadership. Finally, the degree to which the media frame was produced with a white audience in mind.¹³⁶

At the end of the day many of Minister Farrakhan's detractors had to admit that the Million Man March could not have happened if it were not for Minister Farrakhan. Not only did the naysayers have to admit that Minister Farrakhan (the Nation of Islam) was a necessity for the success of the Million Man March, but they also had to acknowledge the beauty, the magnificence, and the hope that this day elicited. U.S. Representative Kweisi Mfume bore witness: "Nobody else could have led such a march... I'm glad Minister Farrakhan told the men to get involved in politics, their communities, and Black organizations. We will now see real change in this country."¹³⁷

Nevertheless, Watkins argued that "(b)ecause it was perceived as threatening, the march necessitated a reaction from some of society's most prominent institutions of social control."¹³⁸ One instrument of control, the framing mechanism of the mass media, also seemed to respond to Farrakhan's overall ascendancy. Books like *The Farrakhan Factor*,¹³⁹ *Prophet of Rage*,¹⁴⁰ *Looking for Farrakhan*,¹⁴¹ and *The Farrakhan Phenomenon*¹⁴² flooded the market with perspectives that seemed peculiarly unable to escape the weight of their apparent biases and the pre-dialogical images of Minister Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam. Arthur Magida, in his *Prophet of Rage*, acknowledged

¹³⁶ Watkins, "Framing Protest," 95.

¹³⁷ Michael H. Cottman, *Million Man March* (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1995), 23–24.

¹³⁸ Watkins, "Framing Protest," 85.

¹³⁹ Robert Singh, *The Farrakhan Factor: African-American Writers on Leadership, Nationhood, and Minister Louis Farrakhan* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1997).

¹⁴⁰ Arthur Magida, *Prophet of Rage: A Life of Louis Farrakhan and His Nation* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1996).

¹⁴¹ Florence Levinsohn, *Looking for Farrakhan* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee Inc., 1997).

¹⁴² Singh, *The Farrakhan Phenomenon*, 223.

Farrakhan's marginalized position but sidestepped Minister Farrakhan's valid retort that the media was responsible for his marginalized position. Magida, argued:

To explain his banishment, Farrakhan took the public person's favored route out of an unpleasant predicament. He blamed the press: "If I am the devil to some, it's not because of something I have done. It's because of the way my words are represented to people through the media." It was true, in a few instances, the news media had misinterpreted Farrakhan's words. But generally, the press treated Farrakhan more gingerly – and surely with more attention – than it treated whites who spouted similar stuff.¹⁴³

Magida asserted that Farrakhan's treatment was not as intense as that directed toward others who were similarly categorized. He seemed unable to recognize that Farrakhan's treatment relative to "whites who spouted similar stuff" is irrelevant to the facts, and the question of degree, that the Minister and the Nation of Islam is being intentionally misrepresented in the media. Treating the Minister "more gingerly" still does not acknowledge or address the media's power to unjustly construct particular images of the Nation via its framing.

The media machine does not resurrect images alone; it also actively defends them. In *Looking for Farrakhan*, for instance, Levisohn expressed gross intolerance for C. Eric Lincoln's personal encounter that ran counter to the constructed media images. She bitterly exclaimed:

It is almost too bewildering to read C. Eric Lincoln's description of Farrakhan as he took Malcolm's position. Lincoln seems to overlook the fact that Farrakhan has been the leading voice of opposition to Malcolm and had made a variety of violent threats against him, though Malcolm had helped to recruit him to the Nation and had been a close friend and mentor for years. Farrakhan was, Lincoln says, "soft-spoken, patient, and gentle to the point of self-effacement. Farrakhan's scholarly approach is in stark contrast to the eager polemics of Malcolm X." Not the man we have come to know as the Nation's leader.

¹⁴³ Magida, *Prophet of Rage*, 170–71.

Levinsohn's bias, quite ironically, did not allow her to recognize the irony of her Farrakhan-Malcolm criticism: if she were able to level the betrayal frame against Minister Farrakhan relative to Malcolm X, could she also do the same for the Malcolm-Elijah relationship? What dynamics existed for the Farrakhan-Elijah relationship? The value of this analysis could have been in its capacity to demonstrate, not just the Minister's betrayal of Malcolm, but his unwavering love and commitment to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, a view that is apparently absent. The absence of this perspective is indicative of the rigidity of the frames and their intentionality of making alternative perspectives virtually impossible. Levinsohn even went so far as to insist that either Minister Farrakhan had undergone "massive changes over the years" or "Lincoln simply misread the sign here as he read them wrong in so many aspects of this organization that he had so obviously come to admire and wanted to present in its best light?"¹⁴⁴ Not once does Levinsohn call her view of Minister Farrakhan into question. Could it have been that the discrepancy derived from a combination of possibilities that included calling her own view into question, just as she had done with C. Eric Lincoln's? At the very least, C. Eric Lincoln's experience should have been used (not dismissed) to contribute to the complexity that is Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam.

The Million Man March added an exclamation to the glaring conundrum for the logical trajectory of the marred image of Minister Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam. It is as if there are (at least) two Farrakhans, something that even the Minister is keenly aware of and perhaps has embraced. Sylvester Monroe captured the Minister's sentiments in a *Time* magazine article published shortly after the Million Man March:

¹⁴⁴ Levinsohn, *Looking for Farrakhan*, 87.

Perhaps Louis Farrakhan put it best last week when he said he was “a nightmare” to some but “a dream come true” to others. That phrase perfectly captured the polarized emotions he engenders between—and within—the races. But the image was apt for another reason as well, for Farrakhan seems somehow to attach to our unconscious. He is a powerful, mysterious figure, elusive and changeable. As blacks and whites spoke of Farrakhan and his role in the Million Man March, they often seemed to be talking about someone they saw not in person or on CNN but in a vision at night.¹⁴⁵

2.8 Conclusion: From Framing to Violence

Framing the Nation had a tremendous impact on how the Nation of Islam was perceived, interpreted, and treated within both popular and scholarly discourse. The distortions, misunderstandings, and misrepresentations examined in this chapter cannot be attributed simply to the Nation’s own efforts, teachings, or historical reality; rather, they were produced through constructed images erected and sustained by academic and mass-media framings. The power of these frames should not be overstated, but neither should it be underestimated or ignored. Their significance resides not only in what they named, emphasized, or sought to accomplish, but also in what they concealed, foreclosed, and rendered impossible. In this sense, the central concern is not merely that the Nation was framed, but that these frames obstructed the possibility of encountering the Nation as a religious other capable of speaking on its own behalf. In the next chapter, we will trace the violence of these frames to the Levinasian face, thereby opening a deeper analysis of what the Nation is actually saying and doing when it appears not as an object of representation, but as an *other* who addresses us.

¹⁴⁵ Monroe, “The Mirage of Farrakhan,” *Time*, October 30, 1995, 18.

CHAPTER 3.

VIOLENCE, THE FACE, AND MONSTROSIFICATION

The previous chapter traced predominant examples of the framing of the Nation of Islam in popular media and academic literature from 1930 to 1996. This chapter argues that such framing was not merely descriptive, interpretive, or polemical; it functioned as a form of violence directed at the Nation's Levinasian face. By reducing the Nation to predetermined categories, dominant media and academic discourse obscured the Nation's own images, expressions, and self-articulations. This chapter names that process monstrosification: the artificial reconstruction of the other's face as dangerous, grotesque, or unworthy of ethical regard, such that authentic face-to-face encounter becomes virtually impossible.

3.1 Framing as Violence Against the Face

The face of the Nation is perceived by the dominant white society as being so *unheimlich* or monstrous that it begins to construct justifications for resorting to its defacement and effacement. We will explore a specific type of *othering* that will be referred to as *monstrosification*, which is the artificial (re)construction or representation of the other's face that ultimately makes an authentic face-to-face encounter with the Nation of Islam as *other* virtually impossible.¹ The framing discussed in the previous chapter is conceptually connected to the veiling that occurs as a part of *monstrosification*. Framing, veiling, monstrosification, and effacement name related but distinct moments in

¹ *Monstrosification* is parallel to Charles H. Long's concept of "empirical others." See Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 1995), 90.

the violence directed toward the other's face. Framing selects and imposes the terms through which the other will be perceived. Veiling covers the other's self-expression with an externally constructed image. Monstrosification intensifies this process by reconstructing the veiled face as dangerous, grotesque, or unworthy of ethical regard. Effacement marks the attempted disappearance of the face altogether, the point at which the other's speech is no longer received as speech. This chapter concludes with a call to resist the violence of *monstrosification*. Authentic face-to-face encounters allow one to maintain a critical posture without committing *monstrosification* and attempting to eliminate the Nation's alterity. Finally, we point toward the methodical considerations that need to be emphasized in examinations of the Nation of Islam.

3.2 The Deconstructive Gaze and the Violence of Framing

The framing of the Nation in the media and academic literature is an example of institutional power. This is evident in the significant impact it had (and has) on the perception of the Nation. Just a cursory examination of framing reveals the extent to which the media constructed images of the Nation that did not facilitate dialogue or foster greater understanding but resulted in immediate condemnation and marginalization of the group. This chapter argues that this was the aim of the tendentious framing of the Nation in the media and the academic literature.

Reflecting on the barrage of media attacks leveled against the Nation immediately after the airing of *The Hate That Hate Produced*, NOI Minister Jabril Muhammad remarked:

Back in 1959, the white press, as if on signal, launched a furious attack on Messenger Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, following the dishonest portrayal of us entitled: "The Hate That Hate Produced." Through such publications *Time*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Newsweek*, *The Reporter*,

Esquire, *Confidential*, *True Saga*, and a host of other magazines and newspapers; white America spewed forth a flood of articles, both superficial, spurious and poisonous in nature. A few among them did a creditable job, as far as they went. But the bulk of what was written was insidious and rotten to the core. But it did not hurt us.²

While the efforts of the white media may not have been effective ultimately, as indicated by Jabril Muhammad, it was, nevertheless, significant in terms of affecting the ways that others related to, perceived, and approached the Nation of Islam. Such a concerted dynamic, described by the representatives of the Nation as “poisonous,” “insidious,” and “rotten,”³ was seen as an indication of something happening that represented an attempt at preventing something from happening, *arriving*, or *taking place*.⁴ The media’s non-accidental, negative treatment of the Nation was seen by the NOI as the result of forces and interests directing the media machinery, as Jabril Muhammad poignantly insinuated: “Members of a large orchestra do not accidentally play the same tune.”⁵ Such an orchestrated response to the Nation in the media presents a compelling heuristic or trace.

What is meant by trace is akin to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identified as what “the deconstructive philosopher” might see when they encounter a sign that demands an inquiry:

This here trace is, in fact, *the mark of an absent presence*. [emphasis mine] I can see that, in fact, what I’m calling a unit, in order to be able to speak, is the mark of a division. I decide to read this thumb print or the step of a bird in the sand or the shit of an animal who’s in the jungle, I decide to read this as the sign of an absent presence.”⁶

² Jabril Muhammad, *This Is the One: The Most Honored Elijah Muhammad—We Need Not Look for Another*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Phoenix, AZ: Book Company, 1996), 36.

³ Jabril Muhammad, *This Is the One*, 36.

⁴ This will become more apparent and will be explicated in chapter 4.

⁵ Jabril Muhammad, *This Is the One*, 36.

⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Feminism and Critical Theory,” in *The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory*, ed. Elizabeth A. Meese and Alice Parker (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1989), 211–12.

Of course, it could very well be the case that the trace is false, a signification of nothing, and to follow such could be a frivolous journey down a very slippery slope. The deconstructive gaze, however, begins with the affirmation that the trace, at the very least, is a sign of something and demands a search for what is and is *not* given the privilege of presence.⁷ Furthermore, the deconstructive gaze is characterized (to borrow John D. Caputo's words) "as a kind of passion or prayer for the impossible, or as an affirmation of the 'undeconstructible,'" which leads us to search in the name of justice, or for justice, or as an act of justice.⁸

It is with this presupposition and orientation that this work approaches the violent framing of the NOI. It is the gaze of the deconstructivist philosopher, if such exists, that precipitates the hermeneutic turn that calls into question the self-evident, uncontested presumptions that have dictated the discourse on and about the Nation of Islam in the media and academic literature. This is the very thing that the trace leads us to question, according to Spivak:

(W)henever you construct any kind of a discourse, if you look at it you will see that at the beginning of the discourse, in order to speak, at the beginning of the discourse there was something like a two-step. The two-step was the necessity to say that a divided is whole. You start from an assumption which you must think is whole in order to be able to speak."⁹

This is the move identified earlier: the preventative measure employed to ensure that something will not happen or take place – it is the inhospitable orientation to what is other. The *construction of discourse* aims toward this end. It attempts to impose a totalizing *unit* that the *two-step* advances in order to dictate the ensuing discourse.

⁷ Spivak, "Feminism and Critical Theory," 212.

⁸ John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 63.

⁹ Spivak, "Feminism and Critical Theory," 211.

Dictating discourse is oxymoronic and antithetical to discursive encounters. As Stuart Hall has pointed out, this kind of “(d)iscourse, in short, had [also has] the effect of sustaining certain ‘closures’, of establishing certain systems of equivalence between what could be assumed about the world [and the other] and what could be said to be true.”¹⁰ This can be difficult to prove if the closures are already established and all that we have to reference is the status quo, but in the case of the Nation of Islam, one can observe the media’s explicit enforcement of discursive closures (which was demonstrated in the examination of the framing of the Nation in chapter 2).

A very significant, yet subtle, contentious struggle was very apparent during Louis Lomax’s interview with the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad in *The Hate That Hate Produced*, specifically when the question of identifying what he (Elijah Muhammad) was teaching.¹¹ It was clear that Mike Wallace and Louis Lomax were upholding and imposing “hate” as *the* defining label for the Nation and its teaching, while the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X identified the Nation’s teachings as “truth” and “love.”¹² Instead of witnessing an authentic engagement to reconcile such an explicit discrepancy, something of a “two-step” was committed and the program continued as if the dissonance created by the NOI’s own signification and objections were insignificant, null, and void. Consequently, the constructed discursive closures made the Nation’s pronouncements that it teaches “truth” and “love” factual impossibilities. Again, we see the power and impact of the two-step: the dominant

¹⁰ Stuart Hall, “The Rediscovery of ‘Ideology’: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies,” in *Culture, Society and the Media*, ed. Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, and Janet Woollacott (London: Methuen, 1982), 71.

¹¹ Mike Wallace, “The Hate That Hate Produced,” *PBS Archives*, 1:34:46, July 13–17, 1959, 10:45–11:02, <https://archive.org/details/PBSTheHateThatHateProduced>.

¹² Wallace, “The Hate That Hate Produced,” 10:45–16:35.

discourse proceeds as if it is an uncontested unit. This makes the deconstructive gaze, if such exists, all the more relevant.

In its attempts to dictate and determine the articulation of truth, the politics of signification place demands for the manufacturing of effects that will pass as “the real.”¹³ This consists of framing fictional constructions as truth. Derrida termed this artificial construction of the “actual” as “aritifactuality” and “actuvirtuality.” He elaborated:

The first feature, therefore, is that actuality is *made*: it is important to know what it is made of, but it is just as important to know that it is made. It is not given, but actually produced, sifted, contained, and performatively interpreted by many hierarchizing and selective procedures – *false* or artificial procedures that are always at the service of forces and interests of which their “subjects” and agents (producers and consumers of actuality...) are never sufficiently aware. The “reality” (to which “actuality” refers) – however singular, irreducible, stubborn, painful, or tragic it may be – reaches us through fictional constructions [*facture*]. The only way to analyze it is through work of resistance, of vigilant counterinterpretation, etc.¹⁴

The unawareness of the artificial or constructed nature of what is presented as “actuality” is what makes the tendentious, malevolent interpretive framing of the machinery so powerful. It presents “actuality” as if it is “reality,” and its seemingly ubiquitous and massive ability to repeat reinforces the “recognition effect,” as well as its “takenforgrantedness.”¹⁵ Consequently, it can proceed uncontested, and run smoothly as a normative backdrop. Over the years, however, the Nation of Islam has taken a vigilant counter interpretive position on its own behalf. The Nation has tirelessly put forth tremendous effort to advance its counter-frames and come to its own defense.

¹³ Hall, “Rediscovery of ‘Ideology,’” 60.

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971–2001*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 86.

¹⁵ Hall. “The Rediscovery of Ideology,” 71.

An often-overlooked example of this can be found in the second edition of Clifton Marsh's *From Black Muslims to Muslims*. Dr. Abdul Alim Muhammad, then the National Representative of the Nation of Islam, issued a forceful response to what he identified as Marsh's blatant caricatures of the Nation. He broached the issue:

I had an opportunity to look through your book. With all due respect, your book is full of distortions and misrepresentations of what the Nation of Islam teaches and what we believe!¹⁶

It must be noted that the author was intentional about capturing the force with which this was stated. Marsh followed up, asking if he could be more specific regarding these alleged misrepresentations and distortions, and Dr. Abdul Alim Muhammad continued:

You don't bother in your book to give accurate information about the coming of Master Fard Muhammad. Who he is, what he is, and what he actually taught. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad [sic] and what the Honorable Elijah Muhammad taught us concerning Master Fard Muhammad. For example, the history of Yacub and the meaning of all that is not accurately covered in your book. And a person who would read that would come away thinking these persons must be a bunch of fools to believe such nonsense. Because, that's what's presented in the book, nonsense! Not the actual teachings we received from the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. It reminded me of the so-called auto-biography [sic] of Malcolm X. Where he [Alex Haley] gives a mocking representation of what he learned from the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. So that if someone takes his [Alex Haley's] mocking representation, they would have a very dim view of the intellectual capacity and understanding of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and those that are with him.¹⁷

In the above excerpt, Dr. Abdul Alim Muhammad is confronting what appears to be distorted misrepresentations of the Nation, or, at the very least, the willful oversight of information from the Nation itself. Interestingly, even with his very cogent appeal, what Dr. Alim Muhammad was challenging remained in place and was shown unwavering

¹⁶ Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Resurrection, Transformation, and Change of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America, 1930–1995*, 174.

¹⁷ Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Resurrection, Transformation, and Change of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America, 1930–1995*, 174–75.

hospitality. Marsh's later editions of this text were deemed to be much "improved" and "expanded,"¹⁸ as they did accommodate the rebirth of the Nation of Islam under the leadership of the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan, a historical development that could not be ignored or denied. Nevertheless, he left the privileged perspective of Elijah Muhammad's son, W.D. Muhammad, who blatantly rejected the religious and theological teachings of his father and advanced a perspective that completely flattened any of the Nation of Islam's religious teachings and significance.¹⁹ It is this perspective that was given assent in Marsh's book; whereas, the Nation's religious/ theological perspective was left in absentia, which is exactly what Dr. Abdul Alim Muhammad was responding to in his impassioned objection.²⁰ The problem is not that one perspective was left in place over or against another, but rather that neither is engaged in a critical conversation and the "truth" of the Nation is never brought to bear. Without this, there is no real discourse with, about, and/or on the Nation of Islam.

3.3 Symbolic Violence and the Politics of Signification

What has been witnessed regarding the Nation is a struggle at the intersection of what Slavoj Zizek identified as two types of objective violence. Zizek explains:

... "symbolic" violence embodied in language and its forms, what Heidegger would call "our house of being" ... (T)his violence is not only at work in the obvious – and extensively studied – cases of incitement and of the relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms: there is a more fundamental form of violence still that pertains to language as such, to its imposition of a certain universe of meaning. Second, there is what I call "systemic" violence, or the often catastrophic

¹⁸ Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Resurrection, Transformation, and Change of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America, 1930–1995*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), ix.

¹⁹ See Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Resurrection, Transformation, and Change of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America, 1930–1995*, 70–71.

²⁰ Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America*, 181–82.

consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems.²¹

This symbolic violence is the principal site where the contention over labeling, naming, and meaning takes place. The dominant meaning-making machinery provides “ideological structurations”²² that serve as “master algorithms.”²³ These “signifying practice(s)”²⁴ are intricate catalysts and forces within the “politics of signification.”²⁵ The “symbolic” violence, as well as the “systemic” violence, function to maintain the Heideggerian “house of being,” with both being engaged in the sort of struggle explained by Hall: “The signification of events is part of what has to be struggled over, for it is the means by which collective social understandings are created – and thus the means by which consent for particular outcomes can be effectively mobilized.”²⁶ The former serves as a trace of even more fundamental violent dynamics, but both work to ensure that the dominant white patriarchal society maintains the power to determine how *others* are perceived, received (or not), and/or responded to— all prior to being encountered. While subjective violence has more visible impacts and more identifiable agents, objective forms of violence are “inherent to this ‘normal,’ peaceful state of things.”²⁷ As for the “singular, irreducible, stubborn, painful, or tragic” reality of the other, it is virtually

²¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 1–2.

²² Hall. “The Rediscovery of Ideology,” 60.

²³ Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 618.

²⁴ Hall. “The Rediscovery of Ideology,” 60.

²⁵ David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization,” in *International Social Movement Research*, ed. Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1988), 198.

²⁶ Hall. “The Rediscovery of Ideology,” 65.

²⁷ Žižek, *Violence*, 2.

impossible for it to show-up due to the programmed effects of the meaning-making machinery's "aritifactuality" and "actuvirtuality."²⁸

3.4 The Levinasian Face of the Nation

In *Totality and Infinity* Emmanuel Levinas asserts that the "way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face."²⁹ He asserts that the "event proper to expression consists in bearing witness to oneself and guaranteeing this witness. This attestation of oneself is possible only as a face, that is, as speech."³⁰ The face is a living presence that is expression and is meaning; the face speaks.³¹ The face then becomes the quintessential capacity of the other to resist being subsumed into another system and to account for itself– to engage discourse on its own behalf. Levinas maintains that:

The face brings a notion of truth which, in contradistinction to contemporary ontology, is not the disclosure of an impersonal Neuter, but *expression*: the existent breaks through all the envelopings and generalities of Being to spread out in its "form" the totality of its "content," finally abolishing the distinction between form and content. This is not achieved by some sort of modification of the knowledge that thematizes, but precisely by "thematization" turning into conversation.³²

The face speaks, and the face of the Nation *speaks*. This understanding, vis-à-vis (placed in direct dialogue with) the fact that the Nation's vehicle of expression was the *Muhammad Speaks*³³ can be seen as another example of the Nation coming to its own assistance, undoing the plasticity of the forms it presents and has been represented on its

²⁸ Derrida, *Negotiations*, 86.

²⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 50.

³⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50–51.

³¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 66.

³² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 51.

³³ The current interpellated call of the Nation is made via its publication, *The Final Call* newspaper.

behalf.³⁴ The self-expression of the other, in the face of its opposition, can be understood as (to borrow Derrida's articulation) the "work of resistance, of vigilant counterinterpretation, etc.,"³⁵ and the violence against the face of the other can be seen as an attempt at total negation of the other— an attempt to murder the other, "not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely."³⁶ Its goal is not understanding but the obliteration of alterity altogether and the prevention of the "truth" of the *other* to be present or to survive.³⁷ This is important because this trace points us to the objective of the meaning-machinery's violence: "violence does not aim simply at disposing of the other as one disposes of a thing, but, already at the limit of murder, it proceeds from unlimited negation. It can aim at only a presence itself infinite despite its insertion in the field of my powers. Violence can aim only at a face."³⁸ It is this face — the face of the other, the face of The Nation— that is at the crux of our discussion.

3.5 Alterity, the Face, and the Problem of the Same

The problem with the Nation is a problem of the face and rests in alterity. At the center of the controversial violence leveled against the Nation in the media and academic literature is this tendency to thematize and categorize the Nation in response to the Nation's alterity. Is the face of the Nation of Islam the source of its perceived *otherness*? Is the Nation's face to be in a perpetual state of *otherness*? Who or what determines the alterity of the Nation and its face?

³⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 66. Levinas emphasized the other coming to their own assistance, and the other "undoes the form he presents."

³⁵ Derrida, *Negotiations*, 86.

³⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 198.

³⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 62. This is an attempt to impede the power of the other to be a revelatory agent of Infinity.

³⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 225.

The basis for the face's alterity is relational and not epistemological or necessarily ontological.³⁹ As Levinas goes on to assert: "The face is fundamental. It does not have any systematic character. It is a notion through which man comes to me via a human act different from knowing."⁴⁰ The imposition of the face presents an inherent problem for the epistemological structuration(s) of the same and the master algorithms of the same.

The attempts to mute or distort the face of the Nation can be viewed as violent attempts to eliminate the possibility of a serious encounter with the Nation due to its perceived danger. This danger can be real or imagined, but it is often taken as a part of the other's identity, albeit a projected one. Levinas purports that "(t)he face threatens the eventuality of a struggle, but this threat does not exhaust the epiphany of infinity, does not formulate its first word. War presupposes peace, the antecedent and non-allergic presence of the *other*; it does not represent the first event of the encounter."⁴¹ The first event is the authentic unadulterated presence of the other's face – its expression καθ'αυτό. The alterity of the face transcends difference and is indicative of an absolute strangeness— "strangeness which cannot be suppressed, which means that it is my obligation that cannot be effaced."⁴² This strangeness does not necessarily correspond as difference within the category of *the same*. It has an obligation to allow for the presence of the *other's* exteriority, because the other represents absolute alterity.⁴³

The violence directed at the face of the other is not focused merely on overcoming difference, but on neutralizing difference and alterity altogether. Specifically, this

³⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50–51.

⁴⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas," by Tamara Wright, Peter Hughes, and Alison Ainley, trans. Andrew Benjamin and Tamara Wright, in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 171.

⁴¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 199.

⁴² Levinas, "The Paradox of Morality," 179.

⁴³ Levinas, "The Paradox of Morality," 170.

violence is what Jacques Derrida described as a “brutality,” one that is “a bad violence, impoverishing, repetitive, mechanical, that does not open the future, does not leave room for the other.”⁴⁴ Distinguished from other types of violence that differentiate, this type of violence exemplified as “the brutality in a discussion, in an argumentation, the dogmatic fiat... that which does not let the other be what he is, does not leave room for the other.”⁴⁵ For Derrida, this unrefined violence “homogenizes and effaces singularity.”⁴⁶ The problem is that the face of the other resists such homogenization and effacement, and it is this fact that places the presence of the other in opposition to the order of the same. Edward Casey has pointedly asserted that “(t)his Other is unique and does not submit to the generalities and platitudes of collectivities; instead of consolidating itself into something conceptually or historically coherent, it is radically heterogeneous, not just to me but to other Others as well.”⁴⁷ But what happens when the alterity of the other represents a direct confrontation and challenge to the powers-that-be, which are the powers of the same? What happens when the other’s alterity is perceived as being exceedingly uncanny and absolutely threatening?

3.6 Intrusion of the Unheimlich⁴⁸

The moment the alterity of the other is perceived as being too other, too uncanny, too strange, too *unheimlich*, that’s when the same’s allergic response is triggered—characterized by shock, awe, and terror. In his essay “The Uncanny,” Sigmund Freud

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis, ed. Giacomo Donis and David Webb (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 92.

⁴⁵ Derrida and Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, 91–92.

⁴⁶ Derrida and Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, 92.

⁴⁷ Edward S. Casey, “The Ethics of the Face to Face Encounter: Schroeder, Levinas, and the Glance,” *The Pluralist* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 81.

⁴⁸ *Unheimlich* is a German term that is utilized by Freud and is translated as “uncanny.”

identified the *unheimlich* as “the name for everything that ought to have remained hidden and secret and has become visible.”⁴⁹ If the *unheimlich* is “what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open.”⁵⁰ Naturally, one has to question how and by whose decisive will has the *unheimlich* been determined to remain secret or hidden? By what criteria does one determine what should be banished to secrecy? Is such banishment just and justified? Is the arousal of fear justification to relegate the other to a proverbial burial? By what closures is the preclusion of the *unheimlich* from coming into the open accomplished, and by what closures is it guaranteed to remain buried? Why would the self-expression, presence, or face of the other provoke such a violent response? These questions take us to the heart of the mechanisms and strategies employed by the same in response to its experience of the other and the world and offer a trace of the psychological bases for the violence witnessed against the other.

The encounter with the *unheimlich* is sufficient, in minimal terms, to have the powers-that-be or the “household of culture”⁵¹ to precipitate attempts to ensure that the *unheimlich* remains “concealed, kept hidden, so that others do not get to know of it or about it, and it is hidden from them.”⁵² The problem is that the secrecy contained within the *heimlich* presumes intimate knowledge about the *unheimlich*. Is what is known about the *unheimlich* what warrants its being locked away? Or is this relegation predicated upon what is not known about the *unheimlich* or its alterity in relation to the *heimlich*?

⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” *New Literary History* 7, no. 3 (1976): 623.

⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 132.

⁵¹ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 72.

⁵² Freud, *The Uncanny*, 129.

Part of the problem is rooted in Freud's construction of the self – it is one that precludes transcendence: the *other* is reduced to a repressed reflection of the self that unhinges the self's feelings of *heimlich* (at-homeness). None of this, of course, considers the fact that the term *heimlich* also invites its opposite within its construction. Freud alerted to this, saying that “among the various shades of meaning that are recorded for the word *heimlich*, there is one in which it merges with its formal antonym, *unheimlich*, so that what is called *heimlich* becomes *unheimlich*.”⁵³ He goes on to assert that “(s)tarting from the homely and the domestic, there is a further development towards the notion of something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret. This notion is extended in a number of ways...”⁵⁴ The ambiguity and relative usage of the term corresponds to the Freudian reference to Gutzkow: “We call that *unheimlich*; you call it *heimlich*.”⁵⁵ Additionally, he maintained that the *heimlich* “is not unambiguous, but belongs to two set of ideas, which are not mutually contradictory, but very different from each other – the one relating to what is familiar and comfortable, the other to what is concealed and kept hidden. *Unheimlich* is the antonym of *heimlich* only in the latter's first sense, not in the second.”⁵⁶

What happens when we take, not just the possibility, but the reality of alterity seriously? Levinas insisted upon this disposition as well as the fact that “(t)his absolute exteriority of the metaphysical term, the irreducibility of movement to an inward play, to a simple presence of self to self, is, if not demonstrated, claimed by the word

⁵³ Freud, *The Uncanny*, 132.

⁵⁴ Freud, *The Uncanny*, 133.

⁵⁵ Freud, *The Uncanny*, 132.

⁵⁶ Freud, *The Uncanny*, 132.

transcendent.”⁵⁷ The central issue is that the *heimlich* seems to construct a totality that makes any encounter with radical alterity from the exterior virtually impossible but absolutely intolerable. The same is the product of an egoism that consists in conquering the alterity of the world and the alterity encountered in the world. Levinas re-imagines how this “egoism” experiences its “at-homeness”:

The way of the I against the “other” of the world consists in *sojourning*, in *identifying oneself* by existing here *at home with oneself* [*chez soi*]. In a world which is from the first other the I is nonetheless autochthonous. It is the very reversion of this alteration. It finds in the world a site [lieu] and a home [maison]. Dwelling is the very mode of *maintaining oneself* [*se tenir*], not as the famous serpent grasping itself by biting onto its tail, but as the body that, one the earth exterior to it, holds *itself* up and *can*. The ‘at-home’ [Le “chez soi”] is not a container but a site where *I can*, where, dependent on a reality that is other, I am, despite this dependence or thanks to it, free.⁵⁸

This experience of the world – the enjoyment of the world – is constituted by its yielding to the “I,” yielding to its power and possession. He continues, articulating the experience of the “I” in the first-person:

...everything is in the site, in the last analysis everything is at my disposal, even the stars, if I but reckoned them, calculate the intermediaries or the means. The site, a medium [Le lieu, milieu], affords means. Everything is here, everything belongs to me; everything is caught up in advance with the primordial occupying of a site, everything is com-prehended.⁵⁹

Everything is at the site and disposal of the same, except for the other, which is not a function of *the same*. If the *heimlich* also means ‘locked away, inscrutable’⁶⁰ and such constitutes the feeling of homeliness and being protected from the outside, then

⁵⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 35.

⁵⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 37.

⁵⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 37–38.

⁶⁰ Freud, *The Uncanny*, 133.

encountering the *other* in a state of being *unheimlich*, not locked away and protected, would be terrifying, “arousing uneasy, fearful horror.”⁶¹

The absolute other is the Other. He and I do not form a number. The collectivity in which I say “you” or “we” is not a plural of the “I.” I, you – these are not individuals of a common concept. Neither possession nor the unity of number nor the unity of concepts link me to the Stranger [l’Etranger], the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself [le chez soi].⁶²

It is the *unheimlich*’s alterity and strangeness that elicits this horrifying effect, which seems alleviated, as with the world, by attempts to possess the other and/or to neutralize her alterity. Levinas explains:

The possibility of possessing, that is, of suspending the very alterity of what is only at first other, and other relative to me, is the *way* of the same. I am at home with myself in the world because it offers itself to or resists possession. (What is absolutely other does not only resist possession, but contests it, and accordingly can consecrate it.) This reversion of the alterity of the world to self-identification must be taken seriously; the “moments” of this identification – the body, the home, labor, possession, economy – are not to figure as empirical and contingent data, laid over the formal skeleton of the same; they are the articulations of the structure.⁶³

This is the *modus operandi* of *the same*, especially as it first encounters alterity via the world. Nevertheless, the world’s alterity resists and gives (of) itself in order for the “I/We” to establish a sense of homeliness and a sense of self-identification (i.e., egoism). The exclusivity of this possession is called into question by the presence of the other.

While Freud generally utilized the *unheimlich* to refer to individual consciousness, he does, as Herbert Marcuse points out, refer to “events and experiences which may ‘awaken’ the repressed material... at the societal level, encountered in the institutions and ideologies which the individual faces daily in which reproduce, in their

⁶¹ Freud, *The Uncanny*, 131.

⁶² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39.

⁶³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 38.

very structure, both and the impulse to overthrow it (family, school, workshop and office, the state, the law, the prevailing philosophy and morality).”⁶⁴ This is especially important for our purposes as it helps us examine the psycho-social roots of the violent, allergic response to the Nation’s alterity within this “household of culture.”⁶⁵ Timothy Beal explains that “(t)aken in this very broad way, the *unheimlich* is that which invades one’s sense of personal, social or cosmic order and security– the feeling of being at home in oneself, one’s society and one’s world. The *unheimlich* is the other within, that which is “there” in the house but cannot be comprehended by it or integrated into it.”⁶⁶

3.7 The Monster Faces: Alterity, Fear, and At-Homeness

The mere presence and expression of the *unheimlich* would be nothing short of a face-to-face encounter with the monster of *the same*’s nightmares (or repressed fantasies). Timothy Beal succinctly stated, “Monsters are personifications of the *unheimlich*. They stand for what endangers one’s sense of at-homeness, that is, one’s sense of security, stability, integrity, well-being, health and meaning. They make one feel *not at home*.”⁶⁷ According to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, the “monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us... (T)he monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond – of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within.”⁶⁸ If the *heimlich* corresponds to “belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, dear and

⁶⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 74.

⁶⁵ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 72.

⁶⁶ Timothy Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 5.

⁶⁷ Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 5.

⁶⁸ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 7.

intimate, homely, etc.,”⁶⁹ then the “*unheimlich* [monster as such] is in some sense what is in the house without belonging there, the outside that is inside.”⁷⁰

The *unheimlich*/monster is “out of place,” and what makes matters more horrifying is that this monster embraces her position as the *unheimlich* and does not wish to become *heimlich*, in the sense of being assimilated into the house. Derrida points out that this other, in its self-expression, announces, “I am not one of the family,” but this statement does more than explicate a fact:

‘I am not one of the family’ is a performative, a commitment... The first dimension of the performative is what I have just said: I am not one of the family, “don’t count me in.” But the second dimension, which in a sense is lodged in the first, and which overflows it, is that the fact of my *not wanting* to be one of the family is *supposed* by the fact of *wanting* to be one of the family. The desire to belong to any community whatsoever, the desire for belonging *tout court*, implies that one *does not belong*... *Accounting for one’s belonging* – be it on national, linguistic, political or philosophical grounds – in itself implies a not-belonging.⁷¹

The Nation of Islam has taken this position in regard and relation to the American household. This is one reason *The Hate That Hate Produced* was so terrifying. It was clear that this nameless monster, generically referred to as “The Muslims,” was a reminder that:

The monster is also that which appears for the first time and, consequently, is not yet recognized. A monster is a species for which we do not yet have a name, which does not mean that the species is abnormal, namely, the composition or hybridization of already known species. Simply, it *shows* itself [*elle se montre*] – that is what the word monster means – it shows itself in something that is not yet shown and that therefore looks like a hallucination, it strikes the eye, it frightens precisely because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure.⁷²

⁶⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, 126.

⁷⁰ Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 5.

⁷¹ Derrida and Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, 28.

⁷² Derrida, *Points*, 386.

It is clear that the NOI monster, framed as a Black nationalist hate group, did not belong; but in addition to this, it was “at-home” with not belonging. It is significant that Mike Wallace identified the Nation of Islam as a “group of Negro dissenters”⁷³ who were “home-grown, Negro American Muslims,”⁷⁴ which signaled the fact that the Nation, while being in the house of America, did not “belong to” America’s *heimlich* and was dangerously *out of place*. In addition to this, the Nation of Islam was committed to bringing to bear the historical atrocities that were locked away and buried by America’s sanitized historical narrative. The fact that the Nation represented a movement within the Black community that would willfully not seek assimilation into the American “house” became the primary reason that Mark L. McPhail asserted that “(t)he documentary [*The Hate That Hate Produced*] established forever in the imaginations of European Americans the image of the Nation of Islam as a dark and evil empire, a shadowy and secretive organization that posed a threat to the American way of life.”⁷⁵ In as much as the “American way of life” was and is a heuristic for white supremacist injustice, the Nation of Islam was and is committed to a rational antithetical stance to such. This does not, however, make the NOI antithetical to America per se. However, when one encounters the Nation’s pronouncements in the opening of the documentary, one can clearly see how this presentation made the Nation appear monstrous under the gaze of the dominant white society’s lens:

I charge the white man with being the greatest liar on earth! I charge the white man with being the greatest drunkard on earth. I charge the white

⁷³ Mike Wallace, “The Hate That Hate Produced,” <https://archive.org/details/PBSTheHateThatHateProduced>, 01:13–01:37.

⁷⁴ Mike Wallace, “The Hate That Hate Produced,” <https://archive.org/details/PBSTheHateThatHateProduced>, 03:15–03:40.

⁷⁵ Mark Lawrence McPhail, *The Rhetoric of Racism Revisited: Reparations or Separation?* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 175.

man with being the greatest swine eater on earth – yet the Bible forbids it! I charge the white man with being the greatest gambler on earth. I charge the white man, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, with being the greatest murderer on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest peace-breaker on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest adulterer on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest robber on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest deceiver on earth. I charge the white man with being the greatest trouble-maker on earth. So therefore, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I ask you, bring back a verdict of guilty as charged!⁷⁶

This is, at the very least, demonstrative of the Nation's propensity to call the very *heimlich* of America into question, demanding an account of what has been made secretive and bringing it into the open for scrutiny.

America, in the face of this NOI stranger, could no longer sustain a self-induced amnesia via false history making and appealing to narratives that make truth, not only impossible but *unheimlich*/monstrous as well. Derrida asserts that “(f)aced with a monster, one may become aware of what the norm is and when this norm has a history – which is the case with discursive norms, philosophical norms, socio-cultural norms, they have a history – any appearance of monstrosity in this domain allows an analysis of the history of the norms.”⁷⁷ This means that the arrival of the monstrous other is to be expected but not anticipated, since the absurdity of white privilege and the proclivity of white violence has conditioned, without question, the parameters and normalcy of the rigidity of *the same*. The Derridean monster's function is to bring the accepted norms under a critical gaze and analysis, something the Nation has consistently done over the years.

⁷⁶ Wallace, *The Hate That Hate Produced*, 01:39–02:35. The words were actually taken from a play, *The Trial*, written by the then-Minister of the Boston Temple, Louis X, today known as Minister Louis Farrakhan.

⁷⁷ Derrida, *Points*, 385–86.

There is an inherent freedom in the *unheimlich*'s/monster's alterity that threatens the *heimlich*'s sense of power. As a matter of fact, Derrida argued that "(o)ne of the meanings of the monstrous is that it leaves us without power, that [*sic*] it is precisely too powerful or in any case too threatening for the powers-that-be."⁷⁸ It is Levinas who describes in detail this power dynamic between *the same* and *the other*:

But Stranger also means the free one. Over him I have no *power*. He escapes my grasp by an essential dimension, even if I have him at my disposal. He is not wholly in my site. But I, who have no concept in common with the Stranger, am, like him, without genus. We are the same and the other. The conjunction *and* here designates neither addition nor power of one term over the other.⁷⁹

The problem is that the same, then, works to establish a power differential that enforces its power over and antithetical to the *unheimlich*. It is the Other's alterity and the same's inability to fully apprehend the other that serves as an impetus of the same's violent act of inscribing its own label and narrative onto the other. This is something that has precedence with the *unheimlich* or monstrous other, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has pointed out:

Any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual. The exaggeration of cultural difference into monstrous aberration is familiar enough. The most famous distortion occurs in the Bible, where the aboriginal inhabitants of Canaan are envisioned as menacing giants to justify the Hebrew colonization of the Promised Land (Numbers 13). Representing an anterior culture as monstrous justifies its displacement or extermination by rendering the act heroic.⁸⁰

From where does this impetus emerge? Ironically, it is the product of the same's internal logic and aggression.

⁷⁸ Derrida, *Points*, 385.

⁷⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39.

⁸⁰ Cohen, "Monster Culture," 7–8.

Through the body of the monster fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion are allowed safe expression in a clearly delimited and permanently liminal space. Escapist delight gives way to horror only when the monster threatens to overstep these boundaries, to destroy or deconstruct the thin walls of category and culture. When contained by geographic, generic, or epistemic marginalization, the monster can function as an alter ego, as an alluring projection of (Other) self.

This dysfunctional, yet highly functional, co-opting of the other into the same's psychism (to borrow Levinas's term) objectifies the monster into a repository and site for the projection of the same's persecutory fantasies, which serves as a basis for the outlandish characterizations of others, like the Nation of Islam as violent, racist, and hateful enterprises when the reality of the other does not correspond to these projections. By what route did the same arrive here? The violence with which *the same* justifies its own at-homeness and possession of the world haunts *the same* as a possibility and appears as a phantom reality in the person of the other. This is evident via an internal ethical rationalization that leads to a paranoid justification of violence toward the other *a priori*. The tragic irony of this is that the violence that is being perceived via the other is the same's own violent tendencies reflecting back from its projection. Judith Butler articulates this internal monologue in her lecture, "Why Preserve the Life of the Other?":

If I contemplate an act of destructiveness and I imagine that others might do as I plan to do, I may end up casting myself as the recipient of that action that might result in a persecutory fantasy strong enough to dissuade me from acting as I thought I might or surely wished. The thought that others might do as I proposed to do, or that others might do to me what I proposed to do to others, proves to be an unmanageable thought. If I become convinced that I will be persecuted, not realizing that the action that I imagined is in part my own imagined action, carrying my own wish, then I might construct a rationale for acting aggressively against an aggression that is coming at me from the outside, or at least seems to be. I can use, as it were, the persecutory phantasm, or perhaps better, the persecutory phantasm makes use of me, to justify my own acts of persecution. That's all the more tragic or comic depending on your point of view when one realizes that it is my own aggression that comes toward me

in the form of another's action and against which I now aggressively seek to defend myself. It is my action, but I assign it to another's name and as misguided as that substitution may be, it nevertheless compels me to consider what I do can be done to me.⁸¹

This allergic response to the other's alterity, the reframing of the other in terms projected onto the other, and the attempt to silence the face of the other is a particular brand of violence that is being called *monstrosification*.

3.8 Monstrosification as Violence Against the Face

Monstrosification is a neologism that signifies the deliberate manufacturing of a distorted image of the Levinasian face. It does not merely misrecognize the other; it reconstructs the other's face in advance as dangerous, grotesque, threatening, or ethically disposable. In doing so, monstrosification substitutes an imposed image for the other's self-expression and prevents the other from appearing καθ'αυτό, on its own terms. Its aim is not understanding but preemptive control: to provide the same with a justification for avoidance, dismissal, management, or violence before an authentic face-to-face encounter can occur. In other words, it is a deliberate caricature of the other's face in an attempt to, *a priori*, provide heuristics that, at the very least, give the imperatives to avoid, to not approach and/or to not engage, or to engage violently. At the very most, these imperatives call for the annihilation of the other altogether. This prejudicial and preconditioning factor makes dialogical reception virtually impossible. The aim of monstrosification is to avoid authentic engagement with the other by providing the impetus "to repeat the traumatization that is the perception of the monster."⁸² If the

⁸¹ Judith Butler, "Why Preserve the Life of the Other?," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values—Interpreting Non-Violence*, lecture, University of California, Berkeley, March 30, 2016, YouTube video, 32:45–34:15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40YPnzv5JzM>

⁸² Derrida, *Points*, 386.

ultimate metaphysical structure is as Levinas has constructed it— a relation without relation that resists the Whole or totality⁸³— then monstrosification is the attempt at forcing a relation by means of altering the original metaphysical condition and at least one of the terms (i.e. the other); and thereby constructing an artificial totality and eliminating the original alterity of the other. Essentially, this fact highlights the danger of inclusivity that is based on monstrosification. What we are left with are the images that elicit the usual fetishistic, already-programmed dialogues, reiterations, and denouncements – all substitutes for authentic engagement and discourse. Monstrosification is the deliberate attempt to arrest or domesticate the alterity of the other. Derrida warned us that “as soon as one perceives a monster in a monster, one begins to domesticate it, one begins, because of the “as such” – it is a monster *as* monster – to compare it to the norms, to analyze it; consequently, to master whatever could be terrifying in this figure of the monster. And the movement of accustoming oneself, but also of legitimation and, consequently, of normalization, has already begun.”⁸⁴

The face itself resists this monstrosification by calling into question the authority of the same’s projections and perceptions. When the *unheimlich* shows up, exceeding the threshold of familiarity and the same’s capacity for mere respect, she is then cast, in the words of Slavoj Žizek, as a *faceless monster*.⁸⁵ For thinkers like Slavoj Žizek and Alain Badiou, sometimes the other’s alterity is too monstrous, and this is when the other is perceived and approached as a *faceless monster*.⁸⁶ Cast as the monstrous other who is too

⁸³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 80–81.

⁸⁴ Derrida, *Points*, 386.

⁸⁵ Mari Ruti, *Between Levinas and Lacan: Self, Other, Ethics* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2015), 80.

⁸⁶ Slavoj Žizek, Eric L. Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 185

monstrous to even be approached as human, the face-to-face encounter that Levinas advocated is made impossible. Žižek asserts, however, that “Levinas fails to include into the scope of ‘human’... the *inhuman* itself, a dimension which eludes the face-to-face relationship.”⁸⁷ But how would one determine such, especially in regard to the epistemological capacity of the other? Is such a justification or is it an attempt at effacing the other *a priori*? This kind of pre-judgment of the other may be an ideological primer that simply reinscribes the cult of the Same. This kind of construction presents a false dilemma, and the machine’s response is pre-formulated – reducing the entire ethical enterprise to a fetishistic gesture that gives assent to the ideological impulse to resort to “smashing the neighbor’s [read: the other’s] face.”⁸⁸ Judith Butler has been consistently concerned with “correcting the fact that our frames of perception cast some people as *faceless monsters*.”⁸⁹[Emphasis mine] Her work has made it clear that “facelessness” is a part of the same’s monstrosification machinery. Specifically, it has highlighted a particular dynamic that is the major aim of monstrosification, which is the elimination of the other’s face altogether– complete effacement. It should come as no surprise that the objective of this violence is an elimination of the face altogether; but because the other lies beyond the totalizing reach of the powers-that-be, the attempt to bury the face under a framing– a veil– and presenting the framed or veiled face as *the* face becomes far more expedient.

⁸⁷ Ruti, *Between Levinas and Lacan*, 80–81.

⁸⁸ Žižek, Santner, and Reinhard, *The Neighbor*, 142.

⁸⁹ Ruti, *Between Levinas and Lacan*, 80.

3.9 Veiling, Effacement, and the Refusal of Encounter

Framing and veiling are traces of an absent presence – an absence of the expression of the other καθ'αυτό. Every veil presupposes a face, just as every lie presupposes the truth. Veiling, the act of framing that occurs within monstrosification, is also an act of domestication– determining and appropriating the signification of *the other* within the familiar framework of *the same*. Veils are used to prevent the καθ'αυτό expression of *the other's* face by presenting a reconfigured/ disfigured image of *the other*, forcing its identification into a reductionistic, totalizing metonymy that makes attacking or complete avoidance of *the other* a meritorious act, complicit with the same. This is accomplished by framing the other in terms that do not dignify the potency and authentic danger of the other's alterity but presents the other in terms that are extremely distorting and ridiculous even. The same's machinery projects the worst of the society onto the monster herself. Cohen explains:

The co-optation of the monster into a symbol of the desirable is often accomplished through the neutralization of potentially threatening aspects with a liberal dose of comedy: the thundering giant becomes the bumbling giant. Monsters may still function, however as vehicles of causative fantasies even without their valences reversed. What Bakhtin calls "official culture" can transfer all that is viewed as undesirable in itself into the body of the monster, performing a wish-fulfillment drama of its own; the scapegoated monster is perhaps ritually destroyed in the course of some official narrative, purging the community by eliminating the sins. The monster's eradication functions as an exorcism and, when retold and promulgated, as a catechism.⁹⁰

This also has ramifications for supporters and sympathizers. Once *the monstrous other* has been veiled in disparaging terms, any association with her can be seen as a contamination of one's socio-political standing. Briahna Gray recently remarked that

⁹⁰ Cohen, "Monster Culture," 18.

“(t)reating popular figures as though they can be fully understood by the worst of their constituent parts obscures both the appeal of those figures and the root of their supporters’ motives. It transforms individuals attracted to those figures into unrecognizable monsters beyond reason, when they have simply prioritized differently than we have, and might be persuaded to see things another way.”⁹¹ This marginalization of these figures and their supporters smacks of the previously mentioned attempt to cast some as *faceless monsters* – beyond the capacity to engage in a face-to-face encounter. Veiling makes the face *unheimlich* – covered over, locked away – but this is also accomplished by its tendency to, in Schelling’s words, “surround it [the face] with an aura of the uncanny.”⁹² In this sense the veil functions more like a barrier – a mechanism that prevents direct or serious theological consideration of the face of the other. Interestingly, the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan, the current face of the Nation of Islam, described his experience of being framed in the media in the language of being veiling, so that his visage in the American popular imagination via the press and popular media is not a true representation of who he is and what the Nation represents, but is rather a distorting trace. Minister Farrakhan explained:

So, they purposely put a veil over me that, "He's anti-white, he's anti-Semitic, he's anti-American, he's anti-Christian, he's anti-gay." So, when you put that [frame/veil] on me, then people of intelligence, rational people say, "I don't want anything to do with that man." That is exactly the intention of those in power.⁹³

⁹¹ Briahna Joy Gray, “On the Dangers of Following Louis Farrakhan,” *Rolling Stone*, March 13, 2018. <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/on-the-dangers-of-following-louis-farrakhan-2-197347/>.

⁹² Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, 132.

⁹³ Louis Farrakhan, “Louis Farrakhan Banned from Britain,” YouTube video, 38:33–39:00, posted by The Malcolm X Channel, June 15, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drpKnBICWC0>.

Ultimately, however, this drama is about the threat of the discursive encounter with the other. It is the threat of discourse with the other that has provoked the allergic response within the academic literature and popular media to have the Nation's face neutralized, covered up, traced over. In this sense the media's framing functions much like a veil, not just calling attention to what lies beneath, but also determining how it will be perceived, received and treated.

Compare this concept with that of Stephen Crane's *The Monster*, a black revisioning of the Frankenstein story, in which Johnson, the protagonist and lynch mob survivor is swathed in bandages and "rendered hypervisible, as in a freak show."⁹⁴ Crane argues that "calling attention to what lies beneath it, the veil is a metaphor for Johnson's [read: The Nation or Farrakhan's] absent face; contiguous with his absent face, it is also metonymic of it. But since the face is itself a metaphor, a symbol of the cultural effacement and feminization of the black man, the veil is also a metaphor of a metaphor."⁹⁵ This metaphor is especially fitting for this aspect of monstrosification – a point that is not lost upon Farrakhan himself. He perceives the experience of the media's and white power structure's violence as a type of veiling. He maintains: "The idea is to isolate me, and hopefully, through the media and everybody calling me a hater, a racist, an anti-Semite, that I would dry up and go away."⁹⁶ Although the Honorable Louis Farrakhan is the modern and postmodern face of the nation, his rhetoric, activism, political posture, and religious witness are nonetheless representative of an amalgam of

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Young, *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 101.

⁹⁵ Young, *Black Frankenstein*, 101.

⁹⁶ Louis Farrakhan, "They Suck the Life from You," interview by Sylvester Monroe, *Time*, February 28, 1994, 25.

the central figures in NOI history and in American media representation; he embodies the significations of Master Fard Muhammad, the mentorship of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, the fiery militancy of Minister Malcolm X, his predecessor at Temple Number 7 in New York City and as national representative.

3.10 Conclusion: Toward the Face-to-Face Encounter

The consistent malicious framing of the Nation reminds us that the power of signification “is not only determined by what is made salient or memorable but also by what is omitted.”⁹⁷ politics of signification is not only determined by what is made salient or memorable, but also by what is omitted, concealed, and prevented from appearing. What has been omitted, or prevented from appearing in the media and academic literature, is the Levinasian face of the Nation of Islam. The Nation’s face, in its self-expression καθ’αυτό, has been deemed too unheimlich, too monstrous, and too disruptive to the same’s sense of at-homeness.

This is due, at least in part, to the Nation’s rejection of America’s dominant Christian social and religious identity, especially as it relates to Black people, and to its sustained challenge to white power structures, beliefs, institutions, and historical amnesia. The Nation’s face calls into question America’s heimlich, its at-homeness with a sanitized self-image that has conveniently locked away its violent and repressive history. Ideally, the presence of the Nation as a socio-religious other should initiate authentic discourse, or a face-to-face encounter. Instead, media and academic discourse have often

⁹⁷ S. Craig Watkins, “Framing Protest: News Media Frames of the Million Man March,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18, no. 1 (March 2001): 98.

opted for monstrosification, distorting and veiling the Nation's face so that encounter with the Nation on its own terms becomes virtually impossible.

Even Robert Singh observes that “(d)irect and full engagement [of the Nation] is otherwise subsumed by wholesale avoidance, when a combative, candid dialogue and an analysis of the real sources of Farrakhan's mass appeal seems of cardinal importance.”⁹⁸ Such discourse would not require uncritical acceptance of the Nation; it would require that the Nation be encountered as a speaking *other* rather than as a prefabricated object of fear. The brutalizing violence leveled against the Nation has been, at root, a refusal of this discursive face-to-face encounter. Chapter 4 turns to the deeper philo-theological and methodological conditions that make this refusal possible, especially within a Western tradition that has too often privileged the security of the same over ethical responsibility to the other.

⁹⁸ Robert Singh, *The Farrakhan Phenomenon: Race, Reaction, and the Paranoid Style in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997), 219.

CHAPTER 4.

BEFORE METHOD: VIOLENCE AND THE WESTERN TRADITION

The effort of this book is directed toward apperceiving in discourse a non-allergic relation with alterity, toward apperceiving Desire— where power, by essence murderous of the other, becomes, faced with the other and “against all good sense,” the impossibility of murder, the consideration of the other, or justice.¹

In the previous chapters we examined the violence committed by the framing mechanisms of both the media and academic machinery in response to the other. In Chapter 3, this problem was examined in terms of the Levinasian face, the monstrosity of the face, and the allergic response to the *other's* face. The chapter ended with the introduction of monstrosification, its corollary, veiling, and a call for robust engagement and discourse. This construction of discourse, especially in its orientation toward and privileging of the other, is precisely what makes it vulnerable to categorical dismissal within traditions governed by the same. Levinas explains: “Discourse, in which it is at the same time foreign and present, suspends participation and, beyond object-cognition, institutes the pure experience of the social relation, where a being does not draw its existence from its contact with the other.”² Most importantly, it is discourse that dignifies the face of the other. But Levinas’s terminology and qualification in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, “against all good sense,” is haunting and acutely distressing, for it *calls into question* what could be considered a very naïve reliance upon the structures of reason – the Western philosophical tradition(s) – that have justified committing violence to the *other* and discourse in general. To be fair, the Western tradition has also generated important internal challenges to its own violence, but the

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 47.

² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 77–78.

interest of this work is in those aspects of its approaches and methods that facilitate violence and impede discourse.

This chapter proceeds by examining several moments within the Western philosophical and methodological tradition that reveal the same's tendency to approach the other through comprehension, objectification, and possession. First, it considers the Cartesian and Kantian inheritance, especially the interiority and confidence of the thinking subject. Second, it examines how major figures in the study of religion—Schleiermacher, Otto, van der Leeuw, Wach, and Eliade—attempt to approach religious experience, the sacred, and the other. While these approaches offer important resources, they also reveal methodological tendencies that risk reducing the other to categories already available to the same. Finally, the chapter turns to the enterprise of knowledge itself and argues for a pre-methodological reorientation rooted in responsibility, discourse, and the face-to-face encounter.

The term “pre-methodological,” refers to the ethical disposition that precedes the selection and application of method. Before one chooses a historical, phenomenological, sociological, theological, or philosophical method, one has already taken up a posture toward the other. That posture may welcome the other as one who speaks, or it may reduce the other to an object to be classified, explained, corrected, or dismissed. The pre-methodological concern, then, is not opposed to method; rather, it asks what ethical orientation makes responsible method possible.

4.1 Levinas, the *Sapere Aude!* and the *Cogito* Tradition

The Cartesian pronouncement, *cogito ergo sum*, and Kant's provocation—*Sapere aude!*—signaled what would become a hallmark of the Western intellectual and

philosophical tradition – an audacious individualistic rationality that raised the problem of authority, *calling into question* the bulwarks of religious and political authority. It would not, however, prevent the emergence of a rationalistic tradition with such an intense interior gaze that a xenophobic or allergic response to alterity seems to be both intrinsic and inevitable. Consequently, philosophy, which should be a vigilant disposition over the life of the question, has often taken on a murderous posture over the life of the other. It has traded its ideals for a pursuit of certainty and security in dogmatic epistemological idols.

Levinas maintained that “Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of *the other* to *the same* by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being.”³ The tradition proceeds from a pretense of *knowledge of*, which is actually *knowledge about* objects under its gaze and power. The resulting epistemological unity is reminiscent of Spivak’s “whole” that perpetrates a “two-step”⁴ in the advancement of its own discourse. For Levinas, Western philosophy has been a “philosophy of power” – one that has maintained the primacy of *the same*, made ontology its golden calf, and neutralized the other via deployment of its own *logos* (rationality).⁵

This feature of Levinas’s thought can be accused, and justifiably so, of being reductionistic and committing monstrosification against the Western tradition. The necessary threshold that would be required to sustain this charge in the affirmative would

³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Feminism and Critical Theory,” in *The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory*, ed. Elizabeth A. Meese and Alice Parker (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1989), 211.

⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 45–46.

require Levinas to intend on the elimination of the *possibility* of discourse and the *muting* of expression of the same. The central and saving feature of the Levinasian approach is that it has two non-mutually exclusive aims: to facilitate discourse and to *leave room for the other*— not as an afterthought but as a starting point. The Western tradition, on the other hand, has utilized methods that have been antithetical (i.e., anti-practical actually) to these objectives. Levinas offers a performative argument in *Totality and Infinity*, demonstrating what he set out to prove. Levinas’s calling-into-question of the Western tradition was not an affront or brutal attack upon it (which would have been the allergic perception and response) as much as it was an attempt to open the tradition up to discourse and alterity.

The Levinasian analysis is a piercing reconsideration of the entire epistemological enterprise of the Western tradition. The Cartesian cogito, or ‘I think,’ comes down to ‘I can,’ which can affirm *the other*, but in its loss of independence, its suppression and possession.⁶ The separation signaled by the *cogito* establishes an interior – “a space of a *cogito*”⁷ – and much like the ideal of Socratic truth, it “rests on the essential self-sufficiency of the same, its identification in ipseity, its egoism.”⁸ Herein lies the Spivakian two-step that is a trace of an internal event that interpolates this egoism’s insistence upon the exclusion of the other. The establishment of an interior orientation of the *I* is characterized by “*identifying oneself* by existing here *at home with oneself* (*chez soi*).”⁹ This establishment is not a pejorative action. As a matter of fact, the Nation of

⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 54.

⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 44.

⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 37.

Islam καθ'αυτό can be considered an establishment of an interior that is predicated upon self-identity.

Levinas, nevertheless, offers a valuable warning that the interior gaze can also produce an “imprisoned being, ignorant of its prison,” and yet “at home with itself.”¹⁰ The Kantian demand for humanity to release itself from a state of *selbst verschuldeten unmündigkeit* or “self-incurred immaturity” in *What is Enlightenment?* could have been a liberating imperative from this self-imprisonment, but it seems (anachronistically so, of course) less revolutionary and probably more shocking – shocking, not because of its stark challenge to aspects of the status quo, but shocking because of its insistence on promulgating an almost absolute *way of the I*,¹¹ the ostensible seeds of which can be detected in Kant’s opening:

Tutelage [Immaturity] is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage [immaturity] when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Sapere aude! "Have courage to use your own reason!" – that is the motto of enlightenment.¹²

Kant’s *sapere* contains a trace of the Cartesian cogito’s psychism, which provokes a rejection of direction or teaching from another [read: *an* other]. Long proclaimed:

The historical cogito is a cogito whose horizon and intentionality may be defined as memory – a mode of perception that anchors our life in prereflective experience, it is this horizon and its intentionality which has been overlooked by those who portray the subject as an ego isolated in contemporaneity.¹³

¹⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 55.

¹¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 37.

¹² Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” (1784), Internet Modern History Sourcebook, Fordham University, accessed February 19, 2021, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/kant-whatis.asp>.

¹³ Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 1995), 53.

Congruent with Long's assessment, Levinas called this an "egology."¹⁴ and "a philosophy of injustice" that places freedom, exercised by the *cogito* and the *Sapere aude!* over a relationship with the other.¹⁵ This call to think independently in reaction to the tyranny that provoked the Enlightenment, while calling the Church and the eco-socio-political powers of Kant's day into question, re-established another tyranny. It gave and gives full assent to its unabated exercise of freedom, an exercise that Kant placed at the core of the Enlightenment: "For this enlightenment, however, nothing is required but freedom, and indeed the most harmless among all the things to which this term can properly be applied."¹⁶ Of course, the latter portion of Kant's statement is naively optimistic and tragic in that it does not indicate the slightest awareness that the exercise of freedom, while it may not be directly harmful to the *I*, may very well leave the other vulnerable to unmitigated violence.

History has borne witness to this tendency in Europe's violent destruction of the Australian Aborigines, the oppressive colonization of India and African countries, the genocide of the Native North Americans, and the brutal enslavement of millions of Africans. Europe's freedom did not prevent the commencement of the xenophobic hegemony that founded and shaped the West. What this freedom afforded the West was the establishment of an axiological core, centered on ontological categories, "which reduces the other to the same, promotes freedom— the freedom that is the identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other."¹⁷ This type of violence aims directly at the face of the other, seeking to take possession and submit it to an

¹⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 44.

¹⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46–47.

¹⁶ Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?"

¹⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42.

objectifying thematization.¹⁸ As Levinas remarked: “The neutralization of the other who becomes a theme or an object— appearing, that is, taking its place in the light— is precisely his reduction to the same.”¹⁹ Again, the Nation of Islam, under the revelatory lights of the same’s media and academic machinery was reduced to being a Voodoo cult and a Black supremacist hate group, which attempted to veil the face of the Nation and neutralize its intrinsic jouissance. The Nation has consistently resisted surrendering to these reductions and has asserted itself in opposition to the various thematizations that have been leveled against them and African Americans in general. Its very presence calls the dominant white society’s power and oppression into question.

4.2 Schleiermacher and the Same’s Straw Man Reconstruction

Even if this is deemed to be an overstatement of the western tradition’s intellectual problem; it is, nevertheless, still a reliable and valid identification of a foundational impetus for violence towards *the other* in the general Western approach and methodology. In response to the emerging influence of this Western brand of rationality, which appeared to subject all things to reason, even religion, Friedrich Schleiermacher argued that religion, as a highly personal and interior experience, slips outside of Reason’s grasp. For him religion had been invaded by metaphysics and morality, and that which belonged to religion had “concealed itself in metaphysics or morals under an unseemly form.”²⁰ This “unseemly form” mentioned by Schleiermacher is analogous to

¹⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

¹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

²⁰ Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, ed. and trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19.

the aforementioned *unheimlich* and the allergic response to its alterity and signals another aspect of monstrosification: *straw man reconstruction*.

The straw man reconstruction of the other shares the same aim as veiling, but it involves the artificial reconstruction of *the other* (or its appearance/ representation) by fusing it with domesticated parts from *the same* (and other *others*). This eliminates the authentic alterity of the other and brings it within the normalizing field of *the same*. The resultant is not the other καθ'αυτό but a hybrid according to the teleological needs and dictates of *the same*.

Schleiermacher observed this occurring in the construction of religion and reprimanded his dissenters: “I find it very unjust if you yourself stitched together something untenable out of such desperate things, call it religion, and then make so much needless ado about it. You will deny that you have begun deceitfully.”²¹ Consequently, he adjured his religious detractors to “deal honestly,”²² after anticipating this kind of deceitful approach, which is the *modus operandi* and defense mechanism of the same. The “stitching together” is a *straw man* reconstruction of others but in less cogent and authentic forms. Derrida explicated this as a possibility in the construction of monstrous *others*: “A monster may be obviously a composite figure of heterogeneous organisms that are grafted onto each other. This hybridization, this composition that puts heterogeneous bodies together may be called a monster,”²³ but it does not adequately represent the other nor does it exhaust all that a monster is.

²¹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 21.

²² Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 21.

²³ Jacques Derrida, *Points: Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 385.

Early attempts to fuse the nascent Nation of Islam with Voodoo, and the later attempt by *The Hate That Hate Produced* documentary (1959) to fuse the Nation of Islam with the United African Nationalist movement (and even adding a tenuous association with President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt) are the most blatant examples of this kind of monstrosification in the media. The resulting “chimerical figure”²⁴ and others like them are reminiscent of Frankenstein’s creation and its excesses, exactly what Schleiermacher observed happening to religion’s reconstruction:

Do you want to put together religion out of these dead and decayed fragments? One can breakdown the fluids of an organic body into its constituent parts; but now take the separated elements, mix them in every proportion, treat them in every way. Will you be able to make life’s blood out of them again? Will what was once dead be able to move again in a living body and become one with it? Every human art runs aground and trying to restore the products of living nature out of their separated constituent parts, and thus you will not succeed in doing it with religion even though you have imagined its individual elements ever so completely from outside; they must proceed from within.²⁵

Schleiermacher argued that the pure image and authentic representation of religion was being contaminated by “the extraneous parts that cling to it, and it should be our business to free it from them.”²⁶ He was convinced that religion would be “swallowed up by morality”²⁷ and that morality itself proceeded “from the consciousness of freedom,” and that it had wished “to extend freedom’s realm to infinity and to make everything subservient to it.”²⁸ Levinas insisted upon the primacy of morality before freedom,

²⁴ Derrida, *Points*, 385.

²⁵ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 33.

²⁶ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 21.

²⁷ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 21.

²⁸ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 23.

acknowledging that the Western tradition perceived limitations imposed on freedom to be tragic and scandalous,²⁹ despite its murderous inclinations when exercised.³⁰

According to Schleiermacher, it was necessary for religion to resist the monstrous machinations from the outside and to “take possession of its own domain, [as] religion renounces herewith all to whatever belongs to those others and gives back everything that has been forced upon it.”³¹ The tyranny of the moralistic and metaphysical reductions prompted him to be adamant about differentiating religion from such; which he attributed, at least in part, to their sharing the same object, “namely, the universe and the relationship of humanity to it.”³² Despite these commonalities, it was absolutely essential that there be a proper differentiation in order for religion to “express or workout another relationship of humanity to it, [and] have another mode of procedure or another goal; for only in this way can that which is similar in its subject matter to something else achieve a determinant nature and a unique existence.”³³ This established the beginning of another totality, reminiscent of the one that rationality attempted to found, or at least was being founded by rationality via the Enlightenment.

This is not an overreaching or a hyper-critical analysis when one observes Schleiermacher’s remark, vis-à-vis the Levinasian *calling into question* of totality, that religion “lives its whole life in nature, but in the infinite nature of totality, the one and all...”³⁴ Here, he is essentially establishing the Levinasian point of departure as an *I* that is *at home with itself*.³⁵ The danger in this dynamic is that it leads to ego-centered

²⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 83.

³⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 84.

³¹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 22.

³² Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 19.

³³ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 19.

³⁴ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 23.

³⁵ See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 36.

reductionism that makes ego/the I/ the same the measure of most, if not all things. Even the objective facticity of religious diversity among human beings could not escape being reduced to a reflection of the self-same in Schleiermacher's construction:

There were moments when, in spite of all distinctions of sex, culture, and external circumstances, you thought, felt, and acted this way, when you really were this or that person. You have really passed through all these different forms within your own order; you yourself are a compendium of humanity; in a certain sense your personality embraces the whole of human nature, and in all its versions this is nothing but your own self that is reproduced, clearly delineated, and immortalized in all its alterations.³⁶

What appeared to be an engagement of the vast diversity and complexity of human religious expression, turned into a gross reduction of these *others* to a reflection of the self, one that exemplifies the *egology* warned of by Levinas. It is this kind of *egology* that was comfortable with framing and reducing the nascent Nation of Islam to a "Voodoo cult" in both the popular and public media.³⁷ Schleiermacher continues:

In whomever religion has thus worked back again inwardly and has discovered there the infinite, it is complete in that person in this respect; he no longer needs a mediator for some intuition of humanity, and he himself can be a mediator for many. Yet you must intuit humanity not only in its being but also in its becoming; it too has a larger course that it does not retrace but on which it progresses; through its inner alterations it too is perfected into something higher and complete.³⁸

Again, a surface analysis of these kinds of statements would lead one to at least suspect that this is commensurate with *the way of the I*, wherein "difference is not a difference; the I, as other, is not an 'other.'"³⁹ It could be postulated that Schleiermacher's construction of religion was a construction that neutralized or flatten

³⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 41.

³⁷ See Erdmann Doane Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," *American Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 6 (May 1938): 894–907.

³⁸ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 41.

³⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 37.

the alterity of religion or transcendence, but at the very least, it can be asserted that his construction marginalized the intellectual aspects of religion and promoted emotive ones. The alterity of the world and humanity seemed swallowed up (to borrow Schleiermacher's term) into this "intuition of humanity" without remainder. This "humanity" enacts an anonymous "Truth" that should "reconcile persons," but instead promulgates an impersonal universality that is another inhumanity.⁴⁰

When Louis Lomax (in *The Hate That Hate Produced* documentary) asked the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad, "Well, what is it that you teach, sir?" and he exclaimed, "Truth," one has to wonder if the reference to truth has a connection with Levinas's construction of truth as "a modality of the relation between the same and the other," which does not "oppose intellectualism, but rather ensure its fundamental aspiration, the respect for being illuminating the intellect."⁴¹ It was the "truth" (i.e. the face of the other) unveiled that called into question the monstrosification of those "othered" by the white man. The Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad exclaimed, "Now, today, the veil must be lifted, do you understand?"⁴² The resulting discourse was to be a function of the "truth" καθ'αυτό, not predicated upon the desire or dictates of the same – a position that was repeatedly asserted by the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad: "Why you are so far behind is due to the white man, who knew the truth of you. He took it and veiled it, put it in books and into symbolic language so you wouldn't see and understand it until time and this is the time that you must know the truth regardless to how it hurts;

⁴⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

⁴¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 64.

⁴² Elijah Muhammad, *Theology of Time: The God Science of the Time*, ed. Nasir Makr Hakim (Atlanta, GA: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 2002), 3.

you must know it.”⁴³ In response the same insists upon its *intuition* and its attempts to *comprehend* or *apprehend* the Nation without relation or discourse.⁴⁴

Levinas asserted that the “mode of depriving the known being of its alterity can be accomplished only if it is aimed at through a third term, a neutral term, which itself is not a being; in it the shock of the encounter of the same with the other is deadened.”⁴⁵

Could religion and/or the divine encounter via Schleiermacher’s construction of religion function as this third term? Could the construction of the divine itself aid in precipitating this outcome? Levinas adds that the “third term may appear as a concept thought. Then the individual that exists abdicates into the general that is thought. The third term may be called sensation, in which objective quality and subjective affection are merged.”⁴⁶

Schleiermacher’s insistence that religion “must indeed be something integral that could have arisen in the human heart, something thinkable from which a concept can be formulated about which one can speak and argue”⁴⁷ corresponds to this Levinasian merger, and the third term is accomplished via the same’s monstrosification of the other (and vice versa).

At its core, monstrosification of the other is (or can be) a projection of the *I* and its reconstruction as non-*I* or alter-ego, and as this “may strike the imagination of the poet precisely because it is but the play of the same: the negation of the *I* by the self is precisely one of the modes of identification of the *I*.”⁴⁸ While it may sometimes present itself as inclusively welcoming the other, it only feigns an openness to exteriority and

⁴³ Elijah Muhammad, *Theology of Time*, 4.

⁴⁴ See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 80.

⁴⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42.

⁴⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42.

⁴⁷ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 21.

⁴⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 37.

transcendence. It is actually an attempt to rob the other (i.e. the world) of its alterity by reducing it to self-identity and possession, as was mentioned in the previous chapter: “the ‘moments’ of this identification - the body, the home, labor, possession, economy - are not to figure as empirical and contingent data, laid over the formal skeleton of the same; they are the articulations of this structure.”⁴⁹ This is not to be taken as an accident but as the intentioned articulation and manifestation of the system’s power and structure. What is witnessed in Schleiermacher is a consecration of this possession of the other.⁵⁰

Schleiermacher exemplified this in the following:

At this moment I am its soul, for I feel all its powers and its infinite life as my own; at this moment it is my body, or I penetrate its muscles and its limbs as my own, and its innermost nerves move according to my sense and my presentiment as my own. With the slightest trembling the holy embraces dispersed, and now for the first time the intuition stands before me as a separate form; I survey it, and it mirrors itself in my open soul like the image of the vanishing beloved in the awkward eye of a youth; now for the first time the feeling works its way up from inside and diffuses itself like the blush of shame and desire on his cheek. This moment is the highest flowering of religion.⁵¹

Schleiermacher’s insistence that the essence of religion “is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling”⁵² can facilitate an enjoyment where the I “withdraws into itself as an involution,”⁵³ which may be inadequate in terms of opening up a dimension “through which it will be able to await and welcome the revelation of transcendence.”⁵⁴ As long as such an involution has the seeds of Desire that come to it

⁴⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 38.

⁵⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 38. “What is absolutely other does not only resist possession, but contests it, and accordingly can consecrate it.”

⁵¹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 32.

⁵² Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 22.

⁵³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 118.

⁵⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 150.

from the presence of the other or even the idea of Infinity, there is hope; for it will be just as it was with Descartes:

It is by reason of this operation of vertiginous descent unto the abyss, by reason of this change of level, that the cartesian cogito is not a reasoning in the ordinary sense of the term nor an intuition...Descartes seeks a certitude, and stops at the first change of level in this vertiginous descent; in fact, he possesses the idea of Infinity, and can gauge in advance the return of affirmation behind the negation. But to possess the idea of Infinity is to have already welcomed the other.⁵⁵

In relation to the Nation of Islam, this means that the problem is not only that outsiders misnamed the Nation, but that they approached it through fragments already detached from its own living theological center. The Nation was not allowed to appear as a speaking religious other; it was reconstructed from fragments made intelligible to the same.

4.3 Rudolf Otto and the *Mysterium Tremendum* of the Other

Schleiermacher would later distinguish religion as a “feeling of utter dependence.”⁵⁶ Rudolf Otto, in his *Idea of the Holy*, gave Schleiermacher credit for his challenge to the rationalization of religion, but he raised a few relevant criticisms of Schleiermacher’s challenge. Otto agreed with Schleiermacher that rationalism had caused the intellectual tradition to ignore other aspects of human experience, a bias that was all too pervasive. He complained:

This bias to rationalization still prevails, not only in theology but in the science of comparative religion in general, and from top to bottom of it. The modern students of mythology, and those who pursue research into

⁵⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 93.

⁵⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 12.

the religion of 'primitive man' attempt to reconstruct the 'bases' or 'sources' of religion, and all are victim to it.⁵⁷

Like Schleiermacher before him, Otto felt as though the rationalization, specifically the hyper-moralization had skewed perspectives on very important concepts, such as the 'holy.'⁵⁸ According to Otto, this term was used to fill-in "with ethical meaning, or what we shall call 'schematization', of what was a unique original feeling-response, which can be in itself ethically neutral and claims consideration in its own right."⁵⁹ Otto thought it was worthwhile to convey "the meaning of 'holy' above and beyond the meaning of goodness,"⁶⁰ which led to his adoption of the term "numinous."⁶¹

The numinous was a *sui generis* mental state that was irreducible to any other mental state and could only be attempted to be understood via serious consideration and discussion of parallel personal experiences.⁶² He argued that Schleiermacher had made a mistake in calling this experience a "feeling of dependence" and differentiated it between being absolute or being relative; he felt like such an analogy made the contrast of this unique experience "a difference of degree and not of intrinsic quality."⁶³ In no uncertain terms, Otto found the "feeling of dependence" designation insufficient, especially in terms of capturing and conveying the "more than" and the "something other" that was at the heart of religious experience.⁶⁴ He registered his objection:

⁵⁷ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 3–4.

⁵⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 5. Otto remarked: "We generally take 'holy' as meaning 'completely good'; it is the absolute moral attribute, denoting the consummation of moral goodness."

⁵⁹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 6.

⁶⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.

⁶¹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7. It is from the Latin *numen*, which is a reference to the spirit or divine power presiding over a thing.

⁶² Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.

⁶³ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 9.

⁶⁴ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10.

We have now to note a second defect in the formulation of Schleiermacher's principle. The religious category discovered by him, by whose means he professes to determine the real content of the religious emotion, is merely a category of self-valuation, in the sense of self-depreciation. According to him the religious emotion would be directly and primarily a sort of self-consciousness, a feeling concerning oneself in a special, determined relationship, viz. one's dependence. Thus, according to Schleiermacher, I can only come upon the very fact of God as a result of an inference, that is, by reasoning to a cause beyond myself to account for my 'feeling of dependence.' But this is entirely opposed to the psychological facts of the case.⁶⁵

Consequently, he gave it his own, better-suited designation: "creature-consciousness" or "creature feeling."⁶⁶ The defining feature of which was the overwhelming, abased emotional state of a creature that realizes its own nothingness in the face of the supreme over all creatures.⁶⁷ Otto's creature-feeling is "itself a first subjective concomitant and effect of another feeling-element, which casts it like a shadow, but which in itself indubitably has immediate and primary reference to an object outside the self."⁶⁸ It was the *mysterium tremendum* that was the primary factor precipitating this creature consciousness. Conceptually, the 'mysterium' denoted that which is hidden and esoteric, beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary, and unfamiliar.⁶⁹ Otto explained:

Taken, indeed, in its purely natural sense, 'mysterium' would first mean merely a secret or mystery in the sense of that which is alien to us, uncomprehended and unexplained... Taken in the religious sense, that which is 'mysterious' is - to give it perhaps the most striking expression—the 'wholly other' (*θαρσενον*, *anyad*, *alienum*), that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the 'canny,' and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10.

⁶⁶ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10.

⁶⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10.

⁶⁸ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10.

⁶⁹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 13.

⁷⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 26.

The *mysterium tremendum* is comprised of an unmatched awefulness,⁷¹ not in the sense of being unpleasant but “Religious dread;”⁷² an abasing “overpoweringness” (majestas) that is akin to “absolute unapproachability;”⁷³ and “energy” or “urgency” – “vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, activity, impetus.”⁷⁴ At its core, it is directly connected to the concept of the monstrous, its alterity, and the rendering of a feeling of powerlessness.⁷⁵ This, of course, places a power differential, or the perception thereof, as the conditioning factor for the response to the *mysterium tremendum*. But what happens when the wholly other comes, not in the height of power, but from a humbled, abased plane? Is the implied surrender to the *mysterium tremendum* only predicated upon an overwhelming power differential? Does the *mysterium tremendum* have to present itself as an impending threat from the outside? What happens if the power dynamic and feelings of dread are reversed? Is it an impossibility for the *mysterium tremendum* to be itself as “wholly other” if, in its revelation (self-presentation), it does not elicit dread or awe? Could this deferment to an expectation of power be an unwelcoming of the other? It is the alterity and heterogeneity of the “wholly other” that constitutes its identity and can liberate or save the same from its stubborn insistence upon determining, possession and committing acts of monstrosification on *the other*.

Otto’s element of fascination (i.e. *fascinans*) is rooted in the experience of “salvation,” which can be only understood as from “the inward teaching of the Spirit.”⁷⁶

⁷¹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 13–19.

⁷² Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 14.

⁷³ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 20.

⁷⁴ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 23.

⁷⁵ Derrida, *Points*, 385. Derrida states: “One of the meanings of the monstrous is that it leaves us without power, that [*sic*] it is precisely too powerful or in any case too threatening for the powers-that-be.”

⁷⁶ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 35.

Interestingly, the inward gaze of the Spirit does not collapse under its own gravity and weight, but is orientated toward the supernatural and transcendent– the “wholly other.”⁷⁷ One reason that Otto’s *fascinans* was associated with salvation was that the inward gaze could very well have left the same doomed to its self- imposed prison, ignorance, and enjoyment. Instead, the inner idea of Infinity provides the *I* with the capacity and opportunity to come outside of itself. This salvation, this liberation, can only come from the other, in its absolute exteriority and irreducibility to an ego-centric psychism or “inward play” that ensures the presence of self-to-self; or in its radical dialectical form, self to non-self.⁷⁸

While Otto dignified the internal religious experience and its commonality across all religions, he did not relegate the religious experience to this inward orientation; he also emphasized the drive toward “something more” and the exteriority of this experience as well:

In all these forms, outwardly diverse but inwardly akin, it appears as a strange and mighty propulsion toward an ideal good known only to religion and in its nature fundamentally non-rational, which the mind knows of in yearning and presentiment, recognizing it for what it is behind the obscure and inadequate symbols which are its only expression. And this shows that above and beyond our rational being lies hidden the ultimate and highest part of our nature, which can find no satisfaction in the mere allaying of the needs of our sensuous, psychical, or intellectual impulses and cravings.⁷⁹

This is where Otto and the Levinasian metaphysical Desire intersect. Otto posited that it was our nature to orientate ourselves to something more, a yearning that is not quenched by “allaying of the needs of our sensuous, psychical, or intellectual impulses and

⁷⁷ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 36–37.

⁷⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 148.

⁷⁹ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 36.

cravings,”⁸⁰ but begets more yearning, searching, curiosity – *fascinans*. For Levinas, the same’s preoccupation with itself is insufficient in its attempt to account for, or totalize, the aims of its desire. The other– its exteriority, its alterity– challenges the Cartesian *cogito* with a desire for exteriority that is “foreign to needs,” and is “a distance more precious than contact, a non-possession more precious than possession, a hunger that nourishes itself not with bread but with hunger itself.”⁸¹ Metaphysical Desire opens up a dimension of height that is a sacrifice, *a dying for*, but not “consumption, nor caress, nor liturgy.”⁸² These are the habitual actions of the same in its effort to possess, manipulate, and represent that which resists such acts. Levinas explains:

The epiphany of exteriority which exposes the deficiency of the sovereign interiority of the separated being, does not situate interiority, as one part limited by another, in a totality. We here enter the order of Desire and the order of relations irreducible to those governing totality. The contradiction between the free interiority and the exteriority that should limit it is reconciled in the man open to teaching.⁸³

Otto pragmatically preserves the “wholly other,” but his privileging of dread, power, and creature-consciousness still leaves open the question of whether the other can be received when it appears not as majestic height but as despised, racialized, and abased religious alterity.

4.4 Gerardus van der Leeuw’s Phenomenology

Such objectification is witnessed in Gerardus van der Leeuw’s *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. Unlike Schleiermacher’s reliance upon feelings of dependence and Otto’s deference to mystery, terror and fascination, van der Leeuw

⁸⁰ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 36.

⁸¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 179.

⁸² Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 34–35.

⁸³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 180.

established an approach that entailed observing what was manifest and then “assigning names.”⁸⁴ In giving names he sought to “separate phenomena and also associate them; in other words, we classify.”⁸⁵ This kind of classification can often have horrific results as it can be the equivalent of getting to know a historical figure by examining their organs. The dismemberment of the other for the sake of categorization and order according to the dictates, needs, and demands of the same is a no less gory endeavor. Of course, it cannot be denied that extremely useful data and facts can be elicited from this body of knowledge but often at the cost of an authentic presence and engagement of the other.

Van der Leeuw charged the researcher with the task of empathetically understanding (*Einfühlung*) by means of “interpolation of the phenomenon”⁸⁶ and evoking an “epoché” that bracketed or suspended value-judgements.⁸⁷ This is a very noble gesture, but in the hands of the same this seems like a perfect opportunity to commit violence to the other’s alterity, even if it is unconscious. The epoché may very well be a denial of the inherent violence of “naming” others and the inherent hermeneutical value-judgements that accompany categorization. This is not a frivolous contention in light of van der Leeuw’s claims that the aim of his phenomenological approach was to construct a meaning that was purely objective, excluding empirical, logical, and metaphysical forms of violence.⁸⁸ The denial of violence here is too concomitant with a reaction formation defense response. He further argued that phenomenology’s one sole desire is “*to testify to what has been manifested to it.*”⁸⁹ This

⁸⁴ Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 674.

⁸⁵ van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 674.

⁸⁶ van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 674.

⁸⁷ van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 675–676.

⁸⁸ van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 677.

⁸⁹ van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 677.

placed the onus of the objectification of the other on the other and absolved the objectifier of said objectification. He did admit the secondary status of this operation:

This it can do only by indirect methods, by a second experience of the event, by a thorough reconstruction; and from this road it must remove many obstacles. To see face to face is denied us. But much can be observed even in a mirror; and it is possible to speak about things seen.⁹⁰

Interestingly, the face-to-face is precluded and denied as a starting point, which necessitates reconstruction and interpretation of the other in absentia. The claim to access, even if in a secondary fashion the religious event, is grossly overreaching and can only lead to disappointment, especially when no prioritization has been given to the metaphysical relation with the other. It is this relation that would ensure that the other attends her own manifestation and does not have her alterity dissolved. It is the primacy of the objectifying dismemberment and reconstruction that makes the face-to-face impossible. Of course, the face-to-face is not denied, as van der Leeuw intimated, but it is, rather, impeded by the approaches by the same. These pre-methodological approaches and considerations are what make the Levinasian face-to-face virtually impossible. Following van der Leeuw's straw man reconstruction of the other, the researcher is left with making sense of the information and formulating authentic understanding (*Verstehen*), and then checking their views against findings across disciplines.⁹¹ This is precisely the methodological danger encountered in the study of the Nation: the researcher names, separates, classifies, and explains, but the Nation's own face is not necessarily permitted to come to the assistance of its own word.

⁹⁰ van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 678.

⁹¹ van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 676–677.

4.5 Joachim Wach's *Religionswissenschaft*

Joachim Wach's *Religionswissenschaft*⁹² was an attempt to accomplish this goal of a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of religions. His construction integrated the historical, psychological, and sociological methods, which he determined to be indispensable and at the core of critical Western scholarship.⁹³ Wach's *Religionswissenschaft* had the *Verstehen* as its aim but inclusive of an empathetic (intuitive) understanding of religions. He felt that religious dogma and content carried an inherent "meaning," and it was important to do justice to the religions by discovering their full "intention."⁹⁴ This required the researcher to take the *self-interpretation* of any religious group absolutely seriously.⁹⁵ Overall, he maintained that the sociological approaches "helped to correct the rationalistic prejudice that only the *intellectual* expression of religious experience counts,"⁹⁶ but criticized the naïve assumptions that the sociological method(s) were the universal key to understanding religions. He pointed out that often the researchers, especially American social scientists, substituted examinations of meaning, value, and truth, for examinations of social *origin, structure, and efficacy*, which made understanding difficult.⁹⁷ This was one of the criticisms that Levinas identified with the sociological orientation of Durkheim. Levinas wrote:

Durkheim already in one respect went beyond this optical interpretation of the relation with the other in characterizing society by religion. I relate to the other only across society which is not simply a multiplicity of

⁹² Friedrich Max Muller (1823–1900) originally introduced this German term and is used to refer to the non-theological academic study of religions. It is often translated as "science of religion," but it actually refers to a broad range of systematic approaches to the study of religion (e.g., history of religions, comparative study of religions, phenomenology of religions, etc.).

⁹³ Joachim Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions*, ed. Gregory D. Alles and Joseph M. Kitagawa (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 134.

⁹⁴ Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions*, 92.

⁹⁵ Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions*, 92.

⁹⁶ Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions*, 136.

⁹⁷ Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions*, 135.

individuals or objects; I relate to the other who is not simply a part of a whole, nor a singular instance of a concept. To reach the other through the social is to reach him through the religious. Durkheim thus gives an indication of a transcendence other than that of the objective. And yet for him the religious is immediately reduce to collective representation: the structure of representation, and consequently of the objectifying intention that subtends it, serves as an ultimate interpretation of the religious itself.⁹⁸

An example of this tendency can be found in Essien-Udom's *Black Nationalism*, which was a meticulous examination of the Nation's organizational structures and internal practices, but it certainly missed the mark in terms of providing the level and kind of meaning and understanding to which Wach referred. Wach envisioned:

...the goal of *Religionswissenschaft* remains to understand and to present as living totalities the religions studied. After they have been disclosed and studied, its desire will always be to place the individual beliefs and ideas, the customs and communal modes, into that context in which alone they live; to connect them and to show them together with the spirit of the entire religion, with the basic intention that animates them, and with the creative religious intuition at their source.⁹⁹

It is apparent that Wach struggled with "preserving the life of the other" (to borrow Butler's phraseology), while (re)presenting the other as an object to be presented, studied, and disclosed. The requirement for the researcher to reanimate the dissected subject conjures images of Martin Jaffee's "spectacle of worlds of meaning lying dissected into patches of tissue and organ on our tables,"¹⁰⁰ or the post-surgical Frankenstenian monster being animated via arbitrary electrocution, which in this case would be analogous to a surge of the "spirit of the entire religion."¹⁰¹ The charge of Wach's *Religionswissenschaft*

⁹⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 68.

⁹⁹ Joachim Wach, "The Meaning and Task of the History of Religions," in *Essays in the History of Religions*, ed. Gregory D. Alles and Joseph M. Kitagawa (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 85.

¹⁰⁰ Martin S. Jaffee, "Fessing Up in Theory," in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, ed. R. McCutcheon (New York: Continuum, 1999), 284.

¹⁰¹ Wach, "The Meaning and Task of the History of Religions," 85.

to “claim the totality of religious phenomena” and to “claim penetration into most distant realms” were consistent manifestations of the same’s ontological structures and power.¹⁰²

4.6 Mircea Eliade’s History of Religion

Mircea Eliade saw the value of Wach’s *Religionswissenschaft* as residing in its capacity to make “the meanings of religious documents intelligible to the mind of modern man.”¹⁰³ The proverbial light that makes existents intelligible is Being (or ontology).¹⁰⁴ Of course, this *telos* granted the modern man’s mind the presumption of objectivity and afforded it unearned assent—beyond questioning and guaranteeing it as a given. He maintained that more “than any other humanistic discipline (i.e., psychology, anthropology, sociology, etc.), history of religions can open the way to a philosophical anthropology,” which would reveal the universality of the sacred and its position as the “matrix of every social institution, technology, moral ideas, arts, etc.”¹⁰⁵ Was this an attempt to make room for the sacred or was it a bold move to entrench already-held conceptualizations of the sacred and religion? Levinas warned:

Totalization is accomplished only in history – in the history of the historiographers, that is, among the survivors. It rests on the affirmation and the conviction that the chronological order of the history of the historians outlines the plot of being in itself, analogous to nature. The time of universal history remains as the ontological ground in which particular existences are lost, are computed, and in which at least their essences are recapitulated.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Wach, “The Meaning and Task of the History of Religions,” 87.

¹⁰³ Mircea Eliade, “A New Humanism,” in *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 2.

¹⁰⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42.

¹⁰⁵ Eliade, “A New Humanism,” 9.

¹⁰⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 55.

Eliade saw the sacred as that which “reveals absolute reality and at the same time makes orientation possible; hence it *founds the world* in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world.”¹⁰⁷

It is for this reason that religious man has always sought to fix his abode ‘at the center of the world.’ *If the world is to be lived in*, it must be *founded*— and no world can come to birth in the chaos of the homogeneity and relativity of profane space. The discovery or projection of a fixed point— the center— is equivalent to the creation of the world...”¹⁰⁸

Eliade saw the epistemological challenge of religion as being anchored within the discovery of their respective sacred centers. This construction, aside from its ontological implications, also has epistemological ones: whether the founding of the sacred worlds (or the abode of the same) is to exist explicitly as a re-articulation of the same’s cogito, a rejection of it, or the accomplishment of synergy and hybridity.

This intrinsically entails a disruption according to the ontological register of the same. The founding of the Nation represented a rejection of participating in the ontological scheme and register constructed by the same, and therefore its alterity was deemed monstrous, but shouldn’t this be a possibility, especially in authentic religious responses? Like the proverbial monster (*monstere*), the sacred disrupts and “manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane.”¹⁰⁹ Eliade elaborated:

When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse. The manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world. In the homogeneous and infinite expanse, in which no point of reference is possible and hence no *orientation* can be established, the hierophany reveals an absolute fixed point, a center.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1987), 30.

¹⁰⁸ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 22.

¹⁰⁹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 22.

¹¹⁰ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 21.

Eliade claimed that there was “a break in plain, that is, it opens communication between the cosmic planes (between earth and heaven) and makes possible ontological passage from one mode of being to another.”¹¹¹ This became the basis for the founding of the world and it was this founding that produced the construction of centers that are fixed locations “where the sacred manifests itself in space, the real unveils itself, the world comes into existence.”¹¹² While the designation “hierophany” indicates “that something sacred shows itself to us,”¹¹³ it does not deliver the absolute nature of the sacred’s alterity – the monstrosity of the other. Any doubts that Eliade’s construction of the sacred is a part of the sphere of the same can be allayed by Eliade’s idea that the “hierophany” consisted of the “manifestation of the sacred in some ordinary object, a stone or a tree– to the supreme hierophany (which, for a Christian, is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ)... we are confronted by the same mysterious act – the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural ‘profane’ world.”¹¹⁴

The presence of the sacred does not seem to call the “profanity” of the profane into question – its categories, its objectifying thematization are the basis of ontological categorization that arrests the alterity of the sacred by tethering it to the expectations and constructions of the sacred from the same. Eliade makes this explicitly clear:

By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes *something else*, yet it continues to remain *itself*, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu. A *sacred* stone remains a *stone*; apparently (or, more precisely, from the profane point of view), nothing distinguishes it from all other stones. But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its

¹¹¹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 63.

¹¹² Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 63.

¹¹³ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 63.

¹¹⁴ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 63.

immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality. In other words, for those who have a religious experience all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality. The cosmos in its entirety can become a hierophany.”¹¹⁵

Here, Eliade’s construction would have *the other* serve two masters. The first is a surrender to the same’s ontological register under a universal theme that both objectifies and removes singularity. The second is the predetermined category of “the sacred,” which attempts to subdue the very alterity that it is meant to signify: the sacred becomes a normalized thematization that imposes a fixed typology of sacrality and alterity – one that controls the other’s inherent excesses and results in monstrosification if the other shows herself to be too monstrous.

The sacred-profane dyad is juxtaposed with the real-unreal/pseudo-real dyad whereby the religious person’s desire “*to be*, to participate in *reality*, to be saturated with power” is actualized via living in a sacred universe.¹¹⁶ Those given the privilege of being associated with the sacred and all of the commendations and gratuitous gestures usually correspond to the sacred’s “mode of being,” while others are relegated to the profane – these two constituting the world, according to Eliade.¹¹⁷ This dichotomy of the world is constructed by identifying and distinguishing spaces occupied by anyone who “rejects the sacrality of the world, who accepts only a profane existence, divested of all religious presuppositions.”¹¹⁸ The problem with this is that what constitutes these religious presuppositions may automatically preclude anything that does not correspond to what is *a priori* accepted as “religious” from the category of “religion.” Black Christianity and

¹¹⁵ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 12.

¹¹⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 12–13.

¹¹⁷ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 15.

¹¹⁸ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 23.

Christianity ensconced in African-derived traditions such as Vodou, Santeria, and Candomble have been called into question as to whether they are faithful representations of the Christian religion; likewise, the Nation of Islam has been called into question in relationship to the Islamic Orthodoxy. The threshold that separates these two spaces or categories are a function of the ontologically privileged “modes of being” that set “the limit, the boundary, the frontier” that distinguishes these two “worlds” and serves as the point of entry from one to the other.¹¹⁹ One discipline that Eliade claimed afforded the researcher this access to the other was history.

4.7 The Same’s Methodology and Confidence

The confidence in history and other disciplines provide researchers with a presumptuous familiarity and a pseudo-universal welcome and embrace, affording researchers an authoritative, *episteme* from within. Eliade claimed that the historian, “by attempting to understand the existential situations expressed by the documents he is studying,” has attained deeper knowledge.¹²⁰ The historical researcher welcomes the dissected and the familiar and claims to have bypassed the vicissitudes of the socio-political-economic contexts by approaching the other from within.¹²¹ Levinas asserted that “Mediation (characteristic of Western philosophy) is meaningful only if it is not limited to reducing distances,”¹²² which is exactly what is at the heart of the varied approaches to studying religion: “‘inside’ versus ‘outside,’ or ‘first person’ versus ‘third person’ descriptions; ‘phenomenological’ versus ‘objectivist,’ or ‘cognitive’ versus

¹¹⁹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 25.

¹²⁰ Eliade, “A New Humanism,” 3.

¹²¹ Eliade, “A New Humanism,” 3.

¹²² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 44.

‘behavioral’ theories; or, perhaps most commonly ‘emic’ versus ‘etic,’... ‘experience-near’ and ‘experience-distant’ concepts.”¹²³ These formulations rest upon geo-spatial analogies that Levinas destabilized on the basis that one can never traverse the space between the I and *the other* but one can remain in relationship with the other despite the impossibility of reaching the other, containing the other, apprehending the other, or occupying the other – all attempts to sidestep discourse and the fact that the interlocutor remains “forever outside.”¹²⁴ Levinas argued that “to know objectively is to know the historical, the *fact*, the *already happened*, the already passed by.

The historical is not defined by the past; both the historical and the past are defined as themes of which one can speak. They are thematized precisely because they no longer speak”¹²⁵ History gives the historian power to relay, reframe, and project a particular narrative, exercising considerable freedom and power. Perhaps the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad knew this of history and purported that instructed the Nation:

First: history is above all our studies. The most attractive and best qualified to reward our research. As it develops the springs and motives of human actions, and displays the consequence of circumstances, which operates most powerfully on the destinies of the human being.¹²⁶

Here it is, on the surface, apparent that the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad is alluding to the fact that history constructs “springs” and “motives” for human action and puts on display the *telos* of said action, which can serve as a determining factor for future

¹²³ Clifford Geertz, “From the Native’s Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding,” in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, ed. R. McCutcheon (New York: Continuum, 1999), 51.

¹²⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 295.

¹²⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 65.

¹²⁶ Jabril Muhammad, “History Is Best Qualified to Reward Our Research,” *The Final Call*, December 27, 2016, accessed September 19, 2021, https://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Columns_4/article_103451.shtml.

conditions. There are at least two possible compliments to what Levinas asserted in regard to history. First, Levinas pointed out that while western historiography provided presentations of the exterior, and was satisfied with such, it was found impotent in terms of, disinterested in, and/or allergic to providing encounters with the potency of the other's interiority or subjectivity. He purported:

The thesis of the primacy of history constitutes an option for the comprehension of being in which interiority is sacrificed. The present work proposes another option. The real must not only be determined in its historical objectivity, but also from interior intentions, from the *secrecy* that interrupts the continuity of historical time. Only on the basis of this *secrecy* is the pluralism of society possible. It attests this secrecy."¹²⁷

The interiority of the other is the secrecy of the other, which is not a possession of the same and has the power to disrupt the totalizing force and flow of history. It is this secrecy that should be allowed to present itself within any epistemological endeavor, as this is inextricably a part of orientating oneself towards the other. The option proposed within *Totality and Infinity* is one that allows the face of the other (or the other's secret) to be shared – not possessed or owned. But history, as it generally stands, seems to seek just that, via the imposition of its explanations and narratives that reinforce the same's hegemonic machinery. Levinas warned that the Western tradition reduced itself to a self-sustaining, self-justifying, impersonal universal order (i.e. history) in reaction to its lack of supremacy over the other.¹²⁸ Knowledge under this system would be reduced to dissimulating the same's hegemony over the other, while denouncing its contingency and facilitating its disappearance into its own totality.¹²⁹ Theory or knowledge in this sense becomes indicative of “comprehension (intelligence) - the logos of being - that is, a way

¹²⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 57–58.

¹²⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 87–88.

¹²⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 87.

of approaching the known being such that its alterity with regard to the knowing being vanishes.”¹³⁰ Although objective knowledge purports to be disinterested, “it is nevertheless marked by the way the knowing being has approached the Real.”¹³¹ As a matter of fact, the claims to the former are effective at obfuscating the latter; for, it is the latter— in its “way” or approach of “knowing”— that ensures the violent outcomes of the meaning-making machinery, which amounts to an erasure of the other’s face. What can actually be witnessed in the literature and popular media on the Nation is a certain type of “brutality” that is “impoverishing, repetitive, mechanical, that does not open the future.”¹³² Jacques Derrida described the effect of this type of violence as “that which does not let the other be what he is, does not leave room for the other.”¹³³ Levinas adds that is an attempt at total negation, an attempt to murder the other, “not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely.”¹³⁴ Levinas continues:

Moreover violence does not aim simply at disposing of the other as one disposes of a thing, but, already at the limit of murder, it proceeds from unlimited negation. It can aim at only a presence itself infinite despite its insertion in the field of my powers. Violence can aim only at a face.¹³⁵

The rationality and psychological orientation of the same of the *cogito* of the western philosophical tradition, especially when approaching and dealing with others, is barely sufficient to (in the words of Freud) “prevent the crudest excesses of brutal violence” and it seems incapable of eliminating the more “cautious and refined

¹³⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42.

¹³¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 64.

¹³² Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 92.

¹³³ Derrida and Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, 92.

¹³⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 198.

¹³⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 225.

manifestations of human aggressiveness.”¹³⁶ The aim of this attempted effacement is to eliminate the possibility of an authentic encounter with the face of the other by eliminating the “speech” of the other altogether. By not making room for the other’s capacity to speak on her own behalf, the other is prevented from showing-up and being present. Instead, the same asserts its own speech and places it in the mouth of the monstrosified other. The representation of the other via the disclosed monstrosified image is a preventive measure against this “speech” and the possibility of having authentic engagement with the Real. Levinas warned us that “(t)o recognize truth to be disclosure is to refer it to the horizon of him who discloses,”¹³⁷ and the disclosed image(s) of the Nation over the years – from it being interpreted and thematically presented as a “Voodoo Cult,” a “Nationalist Hate Group,” to a group of “Pseudo-Islamic Deviants”- reveal more about the source of these disclosures than it does about the NOI καθ’αυτό.

These themes prevent the objectified *other* from speaking on her own behalf, leaving what may (or may not) correspond to the pre-arranged thematized frames and categories to be disclosed, as if they are absolute or ultimate. Alterity, or the sacred καθ’αυτό, “does not shine forth in the *form* by which things are given to us, for beneath form things conceal themselves.”¹³⁸ The other’s alterity is simultaneously revealed and withheld, which is the definition of profanation for Levinas.¹³⁹ For Levinas, the naïve presumption of “the profane,” the assumed unveiling of the real, and the alleged “discovery or projection of a fixed point – the center” to borrow Eliade’s words.¹⁴⁰ must

¹³⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), 59.

¹³⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 64.

¹³⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 192.

¹³⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 257.

¹⁴⁰ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 22.

be called into question, especially as it relates to professed knowledge vis-a-vis the Levinasian face, and the face accomplishes this interpellation of the same by virtue of its presence. Reducing the other to a particular form, manifestation, or center is a reduction to the same and an attempt at neutralizing *the other's* presence altogether.¹⁴¹ Profaning is accomplished when the secret of the other is, ironically, made an impossibility. This promotes an epistemological methodology that invokes myriads of disciplines under the power of the same that prioritize disclosures in the absence of the other. Consequently, the researcher feigns intimate knowledge that provides her with a special, privileged place “inside” a respective tradition— something synonymous with entering “into his [*the other's*] interiority as though by burglary; the other is surprised in his intimacy...”¹⁴² It is the expression of the other καθ'αυτό – the express that “manifests the presence of being, but not by simply drawing aside the veil of the phenomenon.”¹⁴³ Such would be an obvious dissimulation of the ways that epistemology reduces the other to an ontology and/or a phenomenology, which . Levinas purports:

The phenomenon is the being that appears, but remains absent. It is not an appearance, but a reality that lacks reality, still infinitely removed from its being. In the work someone's intention has been divined, but he has been judged in absentia. Being has not come to the assistance of itself... the interlocutor has not *attended* his own revelation. One has penetrated into his interior, but in his absence.¹⁴⁴

4.8 The Enterprise of Knowledge in the Face of the Other

If the previous section examined the confidence of method, this section turns to the deeper problem of knowledge itself. Knowledge— true knowledge— is the essence of

¹⁴¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

¹⁴² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 66–67.

¹⁴³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 181.

¹⁴⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 181.

authentic inquiry and its prerogative does not entail “going onto an object,” but calling itself into question and “penetrating beneath its own condition.”¹⁴⁵ The western tradition has generally harbored a general problem with alterity, especially in its attempts to “know” or “understand.” The violence has been most apparent in its approach which objectifies and thematize in its starting point. This is the methodological two-step, in the name of objectivity, but is, nevertheless, a trace of pre-methodological commitments of the same, which amounts to pre-methodological violence.

Knowledge (and theory) pertaining to the other should designate “a relation with being such that the knowing being lets the known being manifest itself while respecting its alterity and without marking it in any way whatever by this cognitive relation.”¹⁴⁶ The Levinasian face, as a construction, asserts alterity by resisting the arrest of the totalizing tendency of perception and objective knowledge. It would be reasonable to object that this perception or image-construction of *the other* is being overstated and that such is simply concomitant to the way that society exercises epistemological objectivity. The fact of the matter is that the same’s imposition of knowledge onto the other constitutes a deprivation of the other’s self-expression and singularity. It selfishly and intentionally masks the unique singularity that the other is, which is equal to attempting to kill the other who is beyond the power of the same. Levinas explains:

The relationship with the other does not move (as does cognition) into enjoyment and possession, into freedom; the Other imposes himself as an exigency that dominates this freedom, and hence as more primordial than everything that takes place in me. The Other, whose exceptional presence is inscribed in the ethical impossibility of killing him in which I stand, marks the end of powers. If I can no longer have power over him it is because he overflows absolutely every *idea* I have of him.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 85.

¹⁴⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42.

¹⁴⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 87.

What this speaks to is the radical separation that constitute the relationship with the other and confirms the fact that the other's true identity overflows, transcends the idea of the other in the one approaching or studying her. Levinas contended that meaning "is not produced as an ideal essence; it is said and taught by presence, and teaching is not reducible to sensible or intellectual intuition, which is the thought of the same."¹⁴⁸ It is via an epistemological re-orientation that respects the alterity of the other's presence that makes "teaching" from the other possible:

The claim to know and to reach the other is realized in the relationship with the Other that is cast in the relation of language, where the essential is the interpellation, the vocative. The other is maintained and confirmed in his heterogeneity as soon as one calls upon him as sick, to announce to him his death sentence; at the same time as grasped, wounded, outraged, he is "respected." The invoked is not what I comprehend: *he is not under a category*. He is the one to whom I speak – he has only a reference to himself; he has no quiddity. But the formal structure of interpellation has to be worked out. The object of knowledge is always a fact, already happened and passed through. The interpellated one is called upon to speak; his speech consists in "coming to the assistance" of his word – in being present.¹⁴⁹

4.9 Conclusion: Toward a Pre-Methodological Hospitality

The violence examined in the previous chapters cannot be understood only as a problem of bad representation, inaccurate framing, or hostile interpretation. It is also rooted in deeper philo-theological and methodological habits that have shaped the Western tradition's approach to alterity. When knowledge begins from the confidence of the same, the other is too easily transformed into an object of comprehension, a theme

¹⁴⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 66.

¹⁴⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 69.

within discourse, or a phenomenon to be classified. In such a posture, method becomes a vehicle of possession rather than a pathway toward encounter.

The problem, then, is not method itself, but the pre-methodological orientation that precedes method. If the researcher approaches the other from within the security of the same, then even careful method can become violent. It may classify, explain, and interpret while still failing to receive the other as one who speaks. A responsible approach to the Nation of Islam therefore requires more than historical accuracy, sociological attention, or theological comparison. It requires a prior ethical disposition: a willingness to let the Nation appear, speak, and signify beyond the categories imposed upon it.

This pre-methodological turn does not eliminate critique. Rather, it makes critique more responsible by requiring that critique emerge after encounter rather than before it. To approach the Nation through the Levinasian face is to resist the temptation to possess its meaning in advance. It is to allow the other's speech to interrupt the same's confidence. Chapter 5 therefore turns to the face-to-face, the cogito, and the event, asking how the self-enclosed subject may be interrupted by the presence and speech of the other. This prepares the movement toward Chapter 6, where the Nation's own theological self-expression and restless love story can be encountered more directly.

CHAPTER 5.

THE FACE-TO-FACE, THE COGITO, AND THE EVENT

The previous chapters examined the violent frames, methodological assumptions, and pre-methodological dispositions that have veiled the Nation of Islam's Levinasian face. This chapter turns toward the Nation's own face and speech. If monstrosification substitutes a distorted image for the other's self-expression, then the task here is to listen for what the Nation says when it is no longer approached merely through the frames of hatred, deviance, separatism, nationalism, or rage. What emerges is an impossible love story: the love of W. D. Fard for Black people, the love between Fard and Elijah Muhammad, the love Elijah Muhammad bore for Black people, and the love the Nation sought to awaken within Black people for themselves.

This chapter proceeds in three movements. First, it returns to Levinas's claim that the face speaks and that the other attends her own manifestation through speech. Second, it examines the Cartesian cogito and Freud's anxiety over the command to love the neighbor, showing how the same rationalizes distance from the other when the other does not appear as lovable, familiar, or assimilable. Finally, it turns toward the event as the site where the Nation's face and speech emerge beyond the frames imposed upon it. In doing so, this chapter prepares the way for the dissertation's final constructive claim: beneath the veil of monstrosification, the Nation speaks an impossible love story.

5.1 The Face Speaks

The knowledge often sought by the same is interrupted and reoriented by the face. It is often the knowledge that is not sought that is accomplished by the face. The other's arrival and self-presentation is constituted by the other attending her own manifestation.

According to Levinas, Transcendence or the divine reality opens from the human face.¹ The face creates an opening and a vulnerability. Its unfathomable possibilities stress the same's nervously constructed borders, triggering the alarm of the same's deterministic faculties and teasing out deep-seated hopes and fears. This is what the same's violent framing and monstrosification(s) were attempting to veil and prevent from happening or taking place: the raw, vulnerable, excoriating face of the other, which calls into question and commands not to be murdered. It is the self-presentation of the other in an authentic discourse that needs to be preserved over and against the knowledge and *Sinngebung* of the same. Levinas insisted:

The "objectivity" sought by the knowledge that is fully knowledge is realized beyond the objectivity of the object. What presents itself as independent of every subjective movement is the interlocutor, whose *way* consists in starting from himself, foreign and yet presenting himself to me.²

As the face and speech coincide, the preservation of the other's *speech* is the preservation of her face, as it is the other's *speech* that guarantees the other attending her own manifestation.³ It is imperative that the other's speech and identity not be altered in order to ameliorate the allergic response of the same. The 'non-allergic presence of the other' is the first word from the other.⁴ The same's violent response is predicated upon its psychism and ontological schemata that exacerbate the same's murderous impulses. Sigmund Freud is important here because his resistance to the command to love the neighbor reveals how the same rationalizes its refusal of the other when the other cannot

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 78.

² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 67.

³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 296.

⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 199.

be assimilated into familiarity, usefulness, or likeness. Sigmund Freud is useful here because his resistance to the command to love the neighbor reveals how the same rationalizes distance from the other when the other does not appear familiar, useful, lovable, or deserving.

5.2 The Cartesian Cogito and the Problem of the Neighbor

The psychism of the Cartesian cogito, in its self-oriented reflection, produces a deontological reasoning (partly Kantian) that justifies ignoring the ethical injunction to “Love thy Neighbor as thyself,”⁵ which Freud re-articulates in the first-person: “Why should we do it? What good will it do us? But, above all, how shall we achieve it? How can it be possible?”⁶ These, of course, are not neutral lines of reasoning; they rationally beg the question by placing the murderous conclusion within the premises. Freud continues: “My love is something valuable to me which I ought not to throw away without reflection. It imposes duties on me for whose fulfillment I must be ready to make sacrifices. If I love someone, he must deserve it in some way.”⁷ And it should likewise logically follow that if one is to become the object of hate or violence, then they, too, should have deserved such in some way. The justification becomes clear as this reflection reaches the height of its egoism: “He deserves it if he is so like me in important ways that I can love myself in him; and he deserves it if he is so much more perfect than myself that I can love my ideal of my own self in him.”⁸ Essentially, if the other remains other and retains its alterity, then loving the other cannot be justified according to this

⁵ Leviticus 19:18, New International Version.

⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), 56.

⁷ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 56.

⁸ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 56.

reasoning. If the logic halts here, then one could, at the most, expect a passive non-loving or a more active withdrawal of love, but this *loving* is depicted as being incompatible to an ethical egoism, being too difficult, being an injustice, and finally demanding a compliance with an imperative that is the equivalent of loving an enemy. Freud demonstrates:

But if he is a stranger to me and if he cannot attract me by any worth of his own or any significance that he may already have acquired for my emotional life, it will be hard for me to love him. Indeed, I should be wrong to do so, for my love is valued by all my own people as a sign of my preferring them, and it is an injustice to them if I put a stranger on a par with them...And there is a second commandment, which seems to me even more incomprehensible and arouses still stronger opposition in me. It is 'Love thine enemies.' If I think it over, however, I see that I am wrong in treating it as a greater imposition. At bottom it is the same thing.⁹

Freud pointed out that the justification to follow the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself "is really justified by the fact that nothing else runs so strongly counter to the original nature of man."¹⁰

The face-to-face encounter does not merely disclose the other as an object of knowledge; it summons the same into responsibility. This is why the command to love the neighbor becomes so difficult within the logic of the cogito. The cogito seeks assurance, familiarity, and possession, while the neighbor arrives as one who exceeds these conditions. The event, then, names the interruption of this enclosed world by the other's self-presentation. In the case of the Nation of Islam, the event is not only historical; it is theo-philosophical. It is the emergence of a face and speech that the dominant society has repeatedly attempted to frame, veil, and domesticate.

⁹ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 57.

¹⁰ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 59.

5.3 The Face-to-Face Encounter

According to Levinas, the face-to-face encounter is the ultimate situation.¹¹ It is the preeminent convergence of signification, the sign, the signified, and the signifier (irrespectively).¹² This encounter “formulates the first word: the signifier arising at the thrust of his sign, as eyes that look at you.”¹³ It is here that alterity comes as exteriority and destabilizes the tranquility of the same. Levinas insisted:

For only then and there do I find the other as Other, as existing in separation from me even as we share the fact and fate of being members of the same species. Facing the Other is thus a facing up to the Other’s transcendence, to his or her refusal to be drawn into the web of the Same, to be alter to every ego.¹⁴

At the heart of the face-to-face is to *let the Other be*,¹⁵ which is to welcome the other’s face, its calling into question the freedom of the same, its appeal to be unharmed, and its capacity for secrecy and self-revelation – an “*entry into relation*,” the ethical relation.¹⁶ This is justice, although this is not the natural or likely reaction to the presence of the other.

The dynamic between the same and the other necessitates what Robert Singh referred to as a direct, candid – combative even – engagement and dialogue.¹⁷ This is the impetus for the Levinasian restructuring or reorienting of the pre-methodological approach to the other, which is a rethinking of the metaphysical situation altogether. The Levinasian face-to-face would make it necessary to extend an unconditional invitation to

¹¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 81.

¹² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 96.

¹³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 96.

¹⁴ Edward S. Casey, “The Ethics of the Face to Face Encounter: Schroeder, Levinas, and the Glance,” *The Pluralist* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 80.

¹⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 71.

¹⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 181.

¹⁷ Robert Singh, *The Farrakhan Phenomenon: Race, Reaction, and the Paranoid Style in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997), 219.

Muhammad to the table of discourse, “where he expresses himself without our having to disclose him from a ‘point of view,’ in a borrowed light.”¹⁸ As previously asserted, the “event proper to expression consists in bearing witness to oneself, and guaranteeing this witness,” and this “attestation of oneself” is possible in the face of the Other, in the speech of the Other.¹⁹ The other who “speaks attends his own manifestation, is non-adequate to the meaning that the hearer would like to retain of it as a result acquired outside of the very relationship of discourse.”²⁰ It is the authentic presence of the other via the face that exceeds any *Sinngebung* or signification attributed to the other by the “master algorithm,”²¹ (or rather the master’s algorithm). This discourse is an invitation to a live, dynamic engagement, which should not be confused with the preformulated, predetermined processes that have become the smooth-running backdrop of the “politics of signification.”²² What is being extended in the face of the other is an invitation to justice, an opportunity to do things differently. Levinas ventured:

The ethical relation, the face to face, also cuts across every relation one could call mystical [and that the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad would call “spooky”], where events other than that of the presentation of the original being come to overwhelm or subliminate the pure sincerity of this presentation, where intoxicating equivocations come to enrich the primordial univocity of expression, where discourse becomes incantation as prayer becomes rite and liturgy, where the interlocutors find themselves playing a role in a drama that has begun outside of them.²³

¹⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 67.

¹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 201.

²⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 296.

²¹ Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 618.

²² Stuart Hall, “The Rediscovery of ‘Ideology’: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies,” in *Culture, Society and the Media*, ed. Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, and Janet Woollacott (London: Methuen, 1982), 56–90.

²³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 202.

This becomes the basis, not just for resistance but also confrontation. Elijah Muhammad has insisted that he was open to the face-to-face, but the white man avoided such. Elijah Muhammad divulged:

This is why I defy the world of Yakub [the white man] to come and match wits with me. Because I know the world of Yakub [the white man]; but the world of Yakub [the white man] have yet to learn— those who know— that I am from God, and can Master that which I teach. They screech back and hide. They don't want to be brought out, for fear that they will be made little by the Truth in which I will slam against him; because he's the bird I'm after, and he know it. He know I'm shootin' at him. The great arch deceiver, he is. He must be condemned. And when he come face to face with me, he'll humble himself and slinks down. Yeah, slinks away because he don't want to be condemned, and he don't want to have it said that he tried to contend with me. Knowing that he would be the loser; therefore, that would make many of his theological scientists be condemned, without bringing them to the public. So, he flies to get out of the way.²⁴

This is an inextricable requisite to ensure an authentic face-to-face encounter with the Nation, one that is mediated and conditioned by language.

5.4 *Speaking the Language Well*

Language is absolutely the key site of struggle within the same's politics of signification. The Nation of Islam itself has identified language as being quintessential to its success as a marginalized other. According to one of the Nation's lessons in *The Supreme Wisdom*, the Nation was given the following imperative: "Now you must speak the Language so you can use your Mathematical Theology in the proper Term²⁵ – otherwise you will not be successful unless you do *speak* well, for she knows all about you."²⁶ [emphasis mine] This can very well be an imperative to attend one's own

²⁴Elijah Muhammad, *Table Talks of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad: The Transcripts* (Vol. 2), ed. Sultan R. Muhammad and The Honorable Elijah Muhammad Table Talks Project Work Group (Chicago, IL: Muhammad Center Publishing, 2019), 85–86.

²⁵ Here, "term" could refer to a determined, finite, or fixed period of time, or it could refer to the constant and/or variable of a mathematical expression.

²⁶ Fard Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom Lessons*, (Chicago: The Final Call, 1995), 6.

manifestation well. To “speak the language well” is not merely rhetorical discipline; it is the condition by which the Nation preserves its face against the same’s violent translations.

The “she” here could be a reference to the dominant society, and her pretenses to knowledge. This “knowing all about you” could refer to the violent tendency of the same’s psychism to dictate objective knowledge “about” the other via an internal dialogue that projects its violent tendencies onto the other. This pretense to knowledge is found wanting and resorts to gross objectifications and self-fulfilled prophecies. Levinas responded to this terribly flawed epistemological approach to the other: “The claim to know and to reach the other is realized in the relationship with the Other that is cast in the relation of language, where the essential is the interpellation, the vocative.”²⁷ While confirming and never betraying his/her heterogeneity, the “interpellated one is called upon to speak; his speech consists in coming to the assistance” of his word – in being present.”²⁸

The absolute emphasis on the functional use of language by the dominant society attempts to determine meaning and signification. In this mode, the language is used to dictate knowledge “*about you*” (i.e., with reference to, referring to, with regard to, with respect, to respecting, relating to, on, touching on, dealing with, relevant to, with relevance to, connected with, in connection with, on the subject of, in the matter of, apropos). Consequently, this has been an effective tool for keeping the manifestation or expression of the other muffled, nonexistent, or buried; but this is only part of the story. Language has another function, one that stands antithetical to this repressive,

²⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 69.

²⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 69.

exclusionary use. Levinas argues that in its “expressive function language precisely maintains the other – to whom it is addressed, whom it calls upon or invokes.”²⁹ The other is called upon to be themselves and to attend their own manifestation, which is why language, at least for Levinas, cannot be reduced to a particular “activity, expression, and labor, in spite of all the practical side of language, whose importance we may not underestimate”³⁰ It is language that “institutes a relation irreducible to the subject-object relation: the *revelation* of the other.”³¹ This revelatory dynamic is rooted in the speech of the other:

Speech disenchant, for the speaking being guarantees his own apparition and comes to the assistance of himself, attends his own manifestation. His being is brought about in this *attendance*. The speech which already dawns in the face that looks at me looking introduces the primary frankness of revelation.³²

It is here that Levinas takes a point of departure from the Heideggerian ontological construction and purports an ontology that anchors one’s being within their own *attendance*. This quintessential καθ’αυτό expression “is the actualization of the actual,”³³ that runs counter to the meaning-making machinery’s “artificiality” and “actuvirtuality.”³⁴

The entry of beings into a proposition constitutes the original event of their *taking on signification*; the possibility of their algorithmic expression itself will be established on this basis. Speech is thus the origin of all signification - of tools and all human works - for through it the referential system from which every signification arises receives the very principle of its functioning, its key. Language is not one modality of symbolism; every symbolism refers already to language.³⁵

²⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 73.

³⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 205.

³¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 73.

³² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 98.

³³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 69.

³⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971–2001*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 86.

³⁵ Derrida, *Negotiations*, 98.

The ideal that is sought in this is not disclosure, but signification or revelation – a manifestation of the other that betrays the plasticity of objectification’s “form.”³⁶ Consequently, the *other* is not to be approached as a mere object, a possession subsumed by imposed categories of identity and frames of reference; instead, the other must be allowed to “withdraw into its own mystery” and express itself καθ’αυτό.³⁷ For Levinas, “(t)he manifestation of the καθ’αυτό in which a being concerns us without slipping away and without betraying itself does not consist in its being disclosed, its being exposed to the gaze that would take it as a theme for interpretation, and would command an absolute position dominating the object.”³⁸ Levinas maintains that it is “(t)he face of the Other at each moment [that] destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its *ideatum* – the adequate idea. It does not manifest itself by these qualities, but καθ’αυτό. It *expresses itself*.”³⁹

Gayatri C. Spivak apprised us that at the start of a discourse, there is “a covering over of a negotiation [discourse] with something other,”⁴⁰ and it is the threat of this discourse that brings to bear the “vulnerability” of being “inserted into a history of language.”⁴¹ Levinas forewarned us about this allergic response to the other “who breaks this coherence and is hence essentially irrational” tends to “make a thinker a moment of thought,” and forces her into agreement with the same.⁴² The same’s reconstruction of the

³⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 65–66.

³⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 86.

³⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 65.

³⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50–51.

⁴⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Feminism and Critical Theory,” in *The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory*, ed. Elizabeth A. Meese and Alice Parker (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1989), 212.

⁴¹ Spivak, “Feminism and Critical Theory,” 212.

⁴² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 72–73.

other by the force of its disciplines (e.g. history) often reduce the other to a said “moment of thought,” which limits the “revealing function of language.”⁴³ Language in its revelatory and expressive function, however, exposes the same to the immediacy of “transcendence, radical separation, the strangeness of the interlocutors, the revelation of the Other to me [the Same].”⁴⁴ Language is the precondition that makes exteriority, or the orientation *toward* the other and being *for* the other possible. It is what leaves discourse open to the foreign and the facilitation of “a *traumatism of astonishment*.”⁴⁵ Essentially this becomes the condition for self-presentation or self-manifestation of the other, which also entails a calling into question of the same.⁴⁶ Having the same’s self-serving privilege called into question can be seen as an affront to the entire Western enterprise of totality, as Richard McCleary explicated in the following:

Western thought and culture have a historically privileged position among men's creations. The West has invented an idea of truth which requires examination of all cultures in an attempt to incorporate them as aspects of a total truth, and a technology capable of one day sustaining a world culture. Consequently, it has the historical task of *re-examining all things (in terms of their source in the historical life world) in order to face up to the crisis of human culture by revealing its primordial unity and to achieve the new creations of affective cross-cultural unity which are the only justification for its privileged position.*⁴⁷

Therein lies the source of the aforementioned vulnerability - the unadulterated presence of the other, who is anathema to the totalizing tendency of the same’s thematizing and objectifying faculties. According to Levinas, language facilitates the

⁴³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 72.

⁴⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 73.

⁴⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 73.

⁴⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 174.

⁴⁷ Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 1995), 54.

other's incessant surpassing of the *Sinngebung* assigned to the other via the other's signification."⁴⁸

One can, to be sure, conceive of language as an act, as a gesture of behavior. But then one omits the essential of language: the coinciding of the revealer and the revealed in the face, which is accomplished in being situated in height with respect to us – in teaching.⁴⁹

This understanding adds a considerable degree of significance to the Nations statement in its lessons:

Now you must speak the Language so you can use your Mathematical Theology in the proper Term⁵⁰ – otherwise you will not be successful unless you do *speak* well, for she knows all about you.⁵¹ [emphasis mine]

The immediate is the imperative of language - the interpellation, not the already-thematized contact with the Other, but the open, risk-saturated face-to-face encounter.⁵²

The other can only speak if she, as an interlocutor, is the inauguration of her discourse, transcendent to the same's meaning-making machinery and not "*on the same plane*" as the same.⁵³

5.5 Discourse, Saying, and the Event of the Face

The promise and prospect of the Levinasian face of the Nation, as with alterity in general, "opens the primordial discourse" and invokes the ethical obligation to enter into discourse – "the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which no

⁴⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 296.

⁴⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 67.

⁵⁰ Here "term" could refer to a determined, finite, or fixed period of time or it could refer to the constant and/or variable of a mathematical expression. The latter is interesting because it points to the possibility that the NOI's mathematical theology having constants and variable in its expression. Although this goes beyond our purposes here. This has significant implications for NOI theology.

⁵¹ Fard Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom Lessons*, (Chicago: The Final Call, 1995), 6.

⁵² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 52.

⁵³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 101.

‘interiority’ permits avoiding and founds a true universality of reason.”⁵⁴ This universality should not be mistaken for an imposition of a totalizing mechanism but seen as a common plane that “presupposes these singularities or particularities, not as individuals open to conceptualization, or divesting themselves of their particularity so as to find themselves to be identical, but precisely as interlocutors, irreplaceable beings, unique in their genus, faces.”⁵⁵ The metaphysical starting point for Levinas is not the primacy of ontology but that of ethics – a relation that facilitates an “unguarded openness,” “transparency,” and “abrupt actuality” that we recognize as discourse.⁵⁶ This implies that the other as interlocutor is free in the same way and manner that the same is free. The presumption of a threat as a result of this freedom in the face of the other, should not become a justification of preemptive attacks on the other’s face. Eliade warned that the “meeting with the ‘foreign,’ the unknown, with what cannot be reduced to familiar categories in short, with the ‘wholly Other...’ was not devoid of dangers.”⁵⁷

These risks should be accepted as part and parcel to the face-to-face encounter, and thus a commitment to not murder the face of the other must be secured. The face of the other ensures the departure from a prescribed and pre-scripted discourse and engages “the constitution of truth in a struggle between thinkers, with all the risks of freedom.”⁵⁸ This includes allowing the other *to be – to be itself*.

According to Emmanuel Levinas, “the face is a fundamental event, devoid of a systematic character, and is a notion through which the other arrives that is different from

⁵⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 201.

⁵⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 252.

⁵⁶ Edward S. Casey, “The Ethics of the Face to Face Encounter: Schroeder, Levinas, and the Glance,” *The Pluralist* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 80.

⁵⁷ Mircea Eliade, “A New Humanism,” in *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 4.

⁵⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 73.

knowing.”⁵⁹ This *eventuality* of the face is an invitation and an opening for something new, for something unfamiliar – something that appears to be “*the effect that seems to exceed its causes* – and the *space* of an event is that which opens up by the gap that separates an effect from its causes.”⁶⁰ This gap is the matrix for an invitation to a new freedom; it is via this gap that space for the arrival of alterity is made possible. This is what makes the event in the face of the other “as the impossible arrival of something or someone who/ that cannot be recognized as the *arrivant* she, or he, or it is, these confusions and cross-contaminations madden those who put their faith in the mechanisms of identification and recognition, the mechanisms whose inefficacy disseminates the exact time, place, and meaning of arrival.”⁶¹ The event at the center of the Nation’s face is the arrival of Master Fard Muhammad and Elijah Muhammad’s reception of that arrival as divine teaching.

Nevertheless, the name, or the naming of the event itself, must not be mistaken for the reality. It functions instead as an indicator or signifier of the potentiality with which the event is pregnant. Caputo interjects:

Let us start by saying that events are not names or things but something going on *in* names or things... Think of the event as first of all a simmering potency in a name, a possibility that inhabits the name, what that name is trying to express while never quite succeeding, something that the name recalls but never quite remembers, promises but never quite delivers. When we respond to the event in a name, we not only respond to what it “actually” refers to, but we are also being provoked by what it promises or recalls.⁶²

⁵⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, “The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas,” by Tamara Wright, Peter Hughes, and Alison Ainley, trans. Andrew Benjamin and Tamara Wright, in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 171.

⁶⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Event: Philosophy in Transit* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 3.

⁶¹ Michael Marder, *The Event of the Thing: Derrida's Post-Deconstructive Realism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 4.

⁶² John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 59.

Slavoj Žižek asserts that "(T)his is an event at its purest and most minimal: something shocking, out of joint, that appears to happen all of a sudden and interrupts the usual flow of things; something that emerges seemingly out of nowhere, without discernible causes, an appearance without solid being as its foundation."⁶³ Consequently, its arrival can be awful and frightening. It is a clear that there is something *monstrous* about and/or within an *event*. As Derrida observed:

All of history is shown that each time an *event* has been produced, for example in philosophy or in portrait, it took the form of the unacceptable, or even of the intolerable, of the incomprehensible, that is, a certain monstrosity.⁶⁴

Can the usual method of approaching the other preserve the other's inherent, authentic monstrosity? What is the Nation's own, true monstrosity? What shocking, out of joint, awful, frightening arrival does the Nation signify? Is it the spurious hate, racist, and pseudo-religious tropes that have been averred? Although these are highly unlikely to correspond to the Real monstrosity, whatever its monstrosity is, it must be preserved, or it must be allowed to show itself (*monstration*) unabated. Because the unfolding of the event escapes the calculating mechanisms of the dominant society and is a disruptive arrival to the flow of the historical, the same is likely to engage in preventative measures. Derrida explicated this succinctly:

The other, the arrival of the other is always incalculable. This does not fail to produce effects in the machine, but it cannot be calculated by the machine. It is necessary *to think*, that is, *to invent* what is necessary so that we do not close our eyes to the machine and to the extraordinary progress of calculation, while still understanding, within and outside the machine, this play of the other, this play with the other. Once one accepts its principle and gives oneself over to this exposure to the other - to the event that comes to affect us, and therefore to the affectivity by which life is

⁶³ Žižek, *Event*, 2.

⁶⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Points: Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 387.

defined— at that moment, it is necessary to be prepared to invent the coming of a discourse capable of taking this into account.⁶⁵

The event of the face therefore does not remain untouched once it is named, narrated, framed, or interpreted. The question becomes how the event is said, and whether that saying preserves or violates the singularity of the other's arrival.

The problem is that this *taking into account* has amounted to a *saying of the event*. The same's "saying the event" or "saying of knowledge" has the effect of losing the singularity of the event altogether,⁶⁶ which may be in the interest of the dominant culture but not in the interest of the other whose alterity is inextricably bound to its unhindered self-manifestation. The fact that the saying comes after the event leaves the saying insufficient in fully exhausting the saying of the event (although it will allege to do so).⁶⁷ What is often presented is the same's articulation of the event, which is performative in that it produces artificial and decaffeinated⁶⁸ facades of the other, or monstrosification straw men, all reminiscent of Derrida's "artifactuality" and "actuvirtuality" (from chapter 3).⁶⁹ Derrida identified this tendency in the news media:

Television, radio, and newspapers report events, telling us what happened or what's happening. We have the impression that the extraordinary progress in the development of information machines, of machines made for saying the event, the power of information speech. Without dwelling on the obvious, may I remind you that this would-be saying, and even

⁶⁵ Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow: A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 58.

⁶⁶ Jacques Derrida, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 446.

⁶⁷ Derrida, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," 446.

⁶⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 58. Again, this term is borrowed from Žižek and is directly connected to his use of *jouissance*.

⁶⁹ Derrida, *Negotiations*, 86.

showing [*monstration*] of the event, is never, of course, commensurate with it and is never reliable *a priori*.⁷⁰

The saying of the event is presented as constative – merely saying *what is* – but it is actually performative: “(I)n a naturally unsaid, unavowed, and undeclared manner, a saying of the event that makes the event is passed off as a saying of the event.”⁷¹ The saying of the event *a priori* is, more often than not, an endeavor to prevent the arrival of the alterity and its impact, but in an insidious manner due to the attestation that it is an unbiased, objective showing (*monstration*) of the other. This is an example of what Derrida deduced about what the media accomplished by *saying the event*:

This performative saying of the event is a mode of “speaking that consist not in informing, reporting, relating, describing, or noting but in making something happen through speech.”⁷² It is imperative to take a critical disposition over “all mechanisms that hold out the appearance of *saying* the event when they are in fact *making* it, interpreting and producing it.”⁷³

This is exactly what the powerful media frames attempt and also what is absolutely desired as an outcome via monstrosification.

5.6 Elijah Muhammad’s Truth Claim

In *The Hate That Hate Produced* when asked what it was that he was teaching, the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad insisted that it was “truth.”⁷⁴ It is clear that the Nation’s self-understanding is that it is the kind of liberatory “truth-event” that Mari Ruti described as the void of a given situation that is unveiled, producing an ethical opening to “see and do things differently.”⁷⁵ The crucial characteristic is that it was a “locus of

⁷⁰ Derrida, “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event,” 447.

⁷¹ Derrida, “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event,” 447.

⁷² Derrida, “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event,” 447.

⁷³ Derrida, “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event,” 447.

⁷⁴ Mike Wallace, “The Hate That Hate Produced,” *PBS Archives*, 1:34:46, July 13–17, 1959, 10:45–11:02, <https://archive.org/details/PBSTheHateThatHateProduced>.

⁷⁵ Mari Ruti, *Between Levinas and Lacan: Self, Other, Ethics* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2015), 97.

antihegemonic insight: in the same way that the real represents the stumbling block to the symbolic order's fantasy of consistency and legitimacy, the void reveals the repressed irritant that makes the system (or situation) struggle, malfunction, and sometimes fail."⁷⁶

What is of methodological interest is how the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad went about representing these malfunctions in the dominant society: there wasn't anything that he did directly to the system; he seemed to exacerbate tensions already present. Examine this tendency in his words:

Everything has failed you. You have been greatly deceived and disappointed. Church has failed you. The Christian religion has failed you. Your leaders of that religion have failed you. Now the government of America has failed you. You have no justice or equality... You want justice, you want freedom, you want equality, but get none. Your prayer is ever on Capitol Hill. They're ever before congress in the house or senate. Your prayers, pleading for justice for millions of deprived so-called negroes of North America, going without answer. Will you accept an answer to your prayers? Why have you not had an answer to your prayers? Due to the fact you have not been praying to the right God. You have not known the true God. You have not known the true religion. You have not known who was God and who was the devil. You have not known your Self, nor your kind. Therefore, you have met with almost complete destruction.⁷⁷

This is an extended excerpt from the speech used in *The Hate That Hate Produced*, and one can clearly see the stark contrast between the two presentations. What is missed in the previous rendering was the force of Elijah Muhammad's observation— his explicit indictment of Black people's irrational optimistic dependency on the entire white enterprise, from politics to religion, and also the failure of this structure to deliver even a semblance of justice. He perceived what he was doing as *truth telling* and he used this

⁷⁶ Ruti, *Between Levinas and Lacan*, 96.

⁷⁷ Elijah Muhammad, *Uline Arena Speech*, Washington, DC, May 29, 1959, YouTube video, 6:50–9:47, posted by Richmond Ekiye, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaTO30bXpgM>.

truth to destabilize the structures of and the confidence in the white man's social-political *le chez soi*.⁷⁸ Caputo explained this deconstructive disposition:

In a deconstruction, things are made to tremble by their own inner impulse, by force that will give them no rest, that keeps forcing itself to the surface, forcing itself out, making the thing restless... In a deconstruction, the other is the one who tells the truth on the same; the other is the truth of the same, the truth that has been repressed and suppressed, omitted and marginalized, or sometimes just plain murdered, like Jesus himself...⁷⁹

This is an indication of the advent of the invitation extended by the Nation to facilitate an event that has been attempted to be prevented by the same.

We are face to face with the judgment and if we don't understand that we are face to face with the judgment, we may be the losers. America stands before death. America is doomed to death. America is bound to go to her doom, because of the way she has treated us. America have mistreated the black man in America so long, that God cannot hardly wait for us to choose our way. You can say yes or no, I don't care period I'm perfectly independent of what you choose.⁸⁰

The father of Black Liberation Theology, James Cone, argued that Blacks generally, “did not have time for the art of philosophical and theological discourse” or the “systems of Augustine, Calvin, or Edwards or Anselm’s ontological argument, Descartes’ *Cogito, ergo sum*, and Kant’s *Ding an sich*.”⁸¹ Elijah Muhammad, however, was uncanny in his insistence upon exploring the deeper theological questions, which made him determine that true theology is not compatible with religion and involves a process of epistemological liberation. He purported:

Theology is not so easily taught, especially to people who do not know theology. In teaching theology of religion, you have a very hard job with people who don’t know it and who are wrapped up in the belief of religion

⁷⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39. This means “home.”

⁷⁹ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 29.

⁸⁰ Elijah Muhammad, *Theology of Time: The God Science of the Time*, ed. Nasir Makr Hakim (Atlanta, GA: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 2002), 114.

⁸¹ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 50.

which true theology opposes. What we have to do is bring you out of that which you do not know...⁸²

Knowledge was just as important to Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam as truth was, but truth demanded that its bearer be free from the dictates, interests and demands of the same. Levinas explained:

Truth arises where a being separated from the other is not engulfed in him, but speaks to him. Language, which does not touch the other, even tangentially, reaches the other by calling him or by commanding him or by obeying him, with all straightforwardness of these relations. Separation and interiority, truth and language constitute the categories of the idea of infinity or metaphysics.⁸³

Separation and interiority are absolutely prerequisites for the reception and exposition of knowledge and truth, especially that which is independent from the white man's interiority and *I think*. Just as the Cartesian *cogito* affirmed *the other* in its suppression, possession, and loss of independence,⁸⁴ the Nation's *cogito* (or the Muhammadan *cogito*) signaled a particular event: the establishment of *an other's* interior – “a space of a *cogito*”⁸⁵ – independent of the white man or the same's totalizing powers. From the Levinasian perspective, this kind of separation arose from positive events, such as being happy, separated, being an *I* (capable of a *cogito*), and being at home with oneself.⁸⁶ In order to accomplish the Nation's imperative to “Sit yourself in Heaven at once!”⁸⁷ it is absolutely necessary that Black people, at the very least, establish a *cogito* of their own. Elijah Muhammad's truth claim is therefore not merely doctrinal. It becomes the ground

⁸² Elijah Muhammad, *Theology of Time*, 48.

⁸³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 62.

⁸⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.

⁸⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 54.

⁸⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 148.

⁸⁷ Fard Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom Lessons*, 6.

of a different kind of subjectivity, a Muhammadan cogito rooted not in radical doubt but in the certainty of an encounter.

5.7 The Truth-Event and the Muhammadan Cogito

The Muhammadan *cogito* is not the result of a “vertiginous descent into the abyss” of doubt (as we witnessed with the Cartesian *cogito*) but is a stance of certitude rooted in an impossible possibility – an impossible encounter, to which a performative “Yes” is offered. Just as Descartes’s descent was halted by his belief in God, Elijah Muhammad’s ascent was signaled by an encounter with the Divine Reality, God in Person. This is *the* event that gets glossed over or relayed in such a manner that it loses its inherent *monstrosity* of its claim. Elijah Muhammad makes the audacious claim that God is a man and that he met God face-to-face and what he is teaching and saying came from that man who was God in Person. He relayed his *testament* of the truth-event:

God came to me in 1931, in Detroit, Michigan. He taught me for three years and four months in person. I was not dreaming. I was looking at Him in person for three years and four months. He taught me night and day. I used to be glad to get a little sleep. When He would tell me, “I will be back,” I would say, “I hope it would be long enough for me to get a little sleep.” He taught me what you hear me teaching you, three years night and day. I don't think I would be wise to say that I taught myself, and I taught you thus and thus. No, He taught me thus and thus. I didn't know anything. I didn't know my name. I was calling myself by the white man's name. So, whatever you hear me say here this afternoon, it came from his mouth in the way of Divine.⁸⁸

This is the truth-event that coincides with the face of the Nation. One has to admit that “(t)here is by definition, something ‘miraculous’ in an event, from the miracles of our daily lives to those of the most sublime spheres, including that of the divine.”⁸⁹ Its

⁸⁸ Elijah Muhammad, *Theology of Time: The God Science of the Time*, ed. Nasir Makr Hakim (Atlanta, GA: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 2002), 114.

⁸⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Event*, 2.

capacity to dissipate, reconfigure or annihilate the status quo automatically causes an *event* to be the inauguration of both joy and sorrow, cheer and dread, life and death. This becomes a tremendous feat when the dominant society has constructed mechanisms that prevent the advent of the event; and yet, with all of its resources and power, the system fails to accomplish this prevention. It fails to calculate and determine what it deemed as impossible. Levinas continues:

Truth presupposes a being autonomous in separation; the quest for truth is precisely a relation that does not rest on the privation of need. To seek and to obtain truth is to be in a relation not because one is defined by something other than oneself, but because in a certain sense one lacks nothing. But the quest for truth is an event more fundamental than theory, even though theoretical research is a privileged mode of the relation with exteriority we name truth.⁹⁰

Reducing the truth-event and the truth mission claimed by Elijah Muhammad to a purported explanation is an attempt to detract from the authentic *jouissance* unfolding within the truth-event: truth requires that one has the truth encounter as a starting point and not a *need* that fosters a pragmatic response over and above a response to the truth-event itself.

I'm the man always ready for an argument. I am up for fighting all the time until the victory is won. I want to represent Almighty God Allah who has sent me to you– I want to convince you that you have not known the truth, and that you are not in the right religion, and that I have been given the right religion for you and the truth that will stop your enemy – shut their mouths at you. You don't have that kind of a truth that you can shut your enemy's mouth with...⁹¹

⁹⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 61.

⁹¹ Elijah Muhammad, "Raw Truth," delivered at the Peoples Church, Los Angeles, CA, April 11, 1960, YouTube video, 2:41–3:35, posted by TheElijahMuhammad, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzN1dSPXtn4>.

5.8 The Devil, the Evil Genius, and the Refusal of the Same

The Cartesian *cogito* emerges through a meditation that includes the hypothetical possibility of an evil genius or deceiving God.⁹² Descartes speculates, “But what am I, now that I suppose that there is a certain genius, which is extremely powerful, and, if I may say so, malicious, who employs all his powers in deceiving me?”⁹³ The Nation’s *cogito* (or the Muhammadan *cogito*) is also rooted in an evil genius or evil God, but this devil is live and in the person of the white man. Elijah Muhamad explained:

The devil is not something other than flesh and blood. He’s in the flesh and he’s in the blood. He’s visible and he’s a human being... God sees, hears, knows, wills and He acts, right? And He is a person. He is not something invisible. He would not have no joy or pleasure in you and I if He was something other than a human being. He would not have no joy or pleasure in a Universe, which is a material Universe, if He was other than material... If the devil was something other than material, he couldn’t be destroyed. You can’t destroy a spirit. You can destroy man, but you can’t destroy the spirit, because the spirit is something that enters into the man, which we call breath of life. The breath of life is incapable of doing anything worthwhile... unless it has a base to work on, and the base must be a human being... The human being is both God and the devil. There is no such thing as seeking God after you die. There is no such thing as God as a spirit or spook living somewhere in the sky. That is all fairytales. God is a man. The devil is a man. I want you to know these things, and without that true knowledge, you cannot see the hereafter.⁹⁴

Elijah Muhammad’s postulations could have cataclysmic effects in the psyche of anyone who considers them. First, his theological anthropology starts with an epistemological empiricism that invites one to take stock of their existential lot. This is something that one can observe and verify for themselves. This may be an extremely

⁹² René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. David Weissman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 62.

⁹³ Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 65.

⁹⁴ Elijah Muhammad, The Meaning of Spirit, YouTube video, 0:05–1:50, posted by TheElijahMuhammad, April 2, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgRY8H6RnCW>.

perceptible contrast from the religious and starting points of the same, which starts from the ethereal or the spiritual and he vehemently criticized. He arraigned:

You have been born and reared into spooky beliefs, and you believe that all of the prophecies relating to heaven and the lives of those people are something spooky without form and with no desire to eat or even to drink. You make them formless. The fact is that the way we were taught and brought up instilled these spooky beliefs in our minds.⁹⁵

This was a part of the Cartesian *evil genius*'s deception – the distortion of our view of reality. Secondly, and most importantly, by anchoring the divine in an *anthropos*, he added a considerable degree of divine immanence. The force of Elijah Muhammad's propositions brought to bear the fact that his devil was far more metaphysically tangible than any devil that could be conjured by the same and therein lies the danger. Anyone living under the sway of the white man's power and influence might stop and consider: "What if the white man is the devil?" Just considering this as a hypothetical proposition, or better yet a mythological proposition, could have positive outcomes. There is a pragmatic lure that is inherent in this line of reasoning. One that could travel down this consequentialist path, which would have ideological value if one blindly accepted this consideration about the white man, solely based on its teleological benefit. Amos Wilson explained this position:

Some Blacks would debate Elijah Muhammad's view of the world, about the White man being the Devil... The function was bit that of telling truth. The idea was how that mythology (i.e., all Blacks are bad) helped maintain the racial status quo. The idea is not whether Whites are Devils or Angels, but what would happen if we dealt with Whites as if they were Devils. How would that transform or situation as a people? How would that transform our situation as a people? Would it move us closer to doing for self, would it move us closer to controlling our destinies, our own behaviors, gaining control of our economies and our nations? Would it remove us from being manipulated and used by another system? It is not about truth alone; it is about self-control. It is about gaining power...

⁹⁵ Elijah Muhammad, *Our Saviour Has Arrived* (Chicago: Muhammad's Temple No. 2, 1974), 131.

That's why we have to recognize that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad was the greatest psychologist we ever had, and many of us still have not come to understand that yet.⁹⁶

The capacity to *doubt* and *refuse* are the indispensable capacities of a being that is separated, independent, and free – a *cogito*. The assertion or establishment of the Muhammadan *cogito* “constitutes an *event* in being,” which is characterized by resisting being integrated into the same’ totality.⁹⁷ Elijah Muhammad’s/ the Nation’s active interpellation of the same’s (i.e., the white man’s) hegemonic totalization and an interpolation of a call to resist and be liberated from the same’s domination via a fundamental separation.

But what then am I? A thing which thinks. What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing which doubts, understands, conceives, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels.⁹⁸

5.9 Truth and Separation

Levinas asserted that to be “separated is to be at home with oneself. But to be at home with oneself... is to live from..., to enjoy the elemental.”⁹⁹ Truth demands this separation – only a free and independent being can deliver a truth that transcends the knowledge and consciousness of the same. The Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad, having a keen sense of the time and what must be done to liberate his people from the hegemonic grip of white people, argued:

It is the right time that we seek SEPARATION AND INDEPENDENCE for our nation from the evils of our open enemies, and not the foolish things other organizations are doing... IT IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT TO TEACH SEPARATION OF THE BLACKS AND WHITES IN

⁹⁶ Amos N. Wilson, *The Falsification of Afrikan Consciousness: Eurocentric History, Psychiatry, and the Politics of White Supremacy* (New York: Afrikan World InfoSystems, 1993), 29–30.

⁹⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 54.

⁹⁸ Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 66.

⁹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 147.

AMERICA THAN PRAYER. Teach and train the Blacks to do something for self in the way of uniting and seeking a home on this earth that they can call their own!¹⁰⁰

It is separation, according to Levinas, that makes the self-determination of an *existent* possible, and it is the establishment of her interiority that transcends the confines of universal history.¹⁰¹ “We can’t be a free people as long as we are in the white slavemasters’ names...”¹⁰² The event of the truth inaugurates “unforeseeable and disruptive consequences” that reform and reconfigure our *weltanschauungen* (i.e., worldviews), *axiologies* (i.e., values), and *epistemologies* (i.e., knowledge structures), resulting in a radical transformation that the New Testament calls *metanoia*.¹⁰³ Elijah Muhammad also declared that *metanoia* was at the heart of what Master Fard Muhammad and the Nation was ultimately facilitating: a radically “New Mind” and a “New Way of Thinking.”¹⁰⁴ In order to accomplish this, the minds of Black people would have to be liberated from the fundamental psychism of the white man’s world and people.

I am mighty sure that from what I have said here you will see the very necessity of the God changing our way of thinking and then He will change our name and give us a Name, for we never had a name of our own. All of the names that we have been going in are the names of our slavemaster (white race).¹⁰⁵

What Žižek described as ‘miraculous’ is the propensity of an event to disrupt, and alludes to what constitutes the very nature of an *event*, and— to reference Derrida— to what signifies the arrival of the impossible:

(T)hinking of the event as the impossible arrival of something or someone who/ that cannot be recognized as the *arrivant* she, or he, or it is, these

¹⁰⁰ Elijah Muhammad, “Separation! Independence!,” *The Final Call*, December 27, 2020, accessed October 17, 2021, https://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Columns_4/article_102189.shtml.

¹⁰¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 55.

¹⁰² Elijah Muhammad, *Our Saviour Has Arrived*, 93.

¹⁰³ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 27.

¹⁰⁴ Elijah Muhammad, *Our Saviour Has Arrived*, 123.

¹⁰⁵ Elijah Muhammad, *Our Saviour Has Arrived*, 83.

confusions and cross-contaminations madden those who put their faith in the mechanisms of identification and recognition, the mechanisms whose inefficacy disseminates the exact time, place, and meaning of arrival.¹⁰⁶

This is the truth-event at the heart of the Nation's face and expression. It is from this encounter with God in Person that Elijah Muhammad established his *cogito*:

We, the people, by the Guidance of Almighty and All-Wise Allah to Whom Praises be forever has taught us the truth. We don't reckon about whether or not that he has taught us the truth; *we know [cogito]* he has taught us the truth. I'm not going to the library to the college or university of America and Europe to find out whether or not he taught me the truth or not. I don't have to get any witness out of their educational system to bear me witness whether or not that God has spoken the truth; *I know [cogito]* he has spoken the truth. *I know [cogito]* that. I'm not an educated man I have no degrees from your college and university. I have only the teachings of Almighty God Allah. I have only been a student under Him. I'm not boasting that I am your equal in education, but I do boast that I have the Word of God to deliver to you. [Emphasis mine]¹⁰⁷

How did Elijah Muhammad *know*? Was it a cognitive recognition based on a calculative alignment? Was this the result of a critical mass of already-held views and beliefs being met by what was being taught? C. E. Lincoln perhaps provided an indication of what is the impetus for the *cogito* espoused by the Nation when he postulated that “true believers ‘know’ the ‘truth’ through faith. They know it with their hearts rather than with their minds.”¹⁰⁸ “Nietzsche understands the very birth of interiority as the consequence of the advent of an absolute No-Saying or “God,” thereby fully paralleling a Kierkegaardian understanding of *Angst* or dread or sickness unto death, an *Angst* only possible as a consequence of an absolute negation or refusal of God...”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Marder, *The Event of the Thing*, 4.

¹⁰⁷ Elijah Muhammad, *Separation or Death*, YouTube video, 17:00–18:34, posted by IronMuhammad68, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpAphNfHHcE>.

¹⁰⁸ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 100.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas J. J. Altizer, *Living the Death of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 90.

By extension of this, it could be maintained that Elijah Muhammad's *cogito* is rooted in an absolute refusal of the God of the same. This is only half of the narrative because Elijah Muhammad's *cogito* does not end in negation. His refusal of the God of the same simultaneously opens the possibility of receiving the God who arrives from beyond the same's categories, orthodoxies, and ontological guarantees. In this sense, the Muhammadan *cogito* is not merely a rejection of the false god produced by the dominant order; it is also an affirmation of the God who speaks, teaches, liberates, and inaugurates a new consciousness through the event of encounter.

5.10 The Arrival of the Master and the Event of the Nation's Speech

The incalculable arrival of the other is *the* foundational event of the Nation's face. This is best exemplified in the founding of the Nation of Islam. Despite its importance and significance, this event is often minimized, distorted, and ill-articulated. The arrival of Master Fard Muhammad and his meeting with the Honorable Elijah Muhammad is *the* quintessential event that conditions the Nation's speech. It is the event *in* the name, in the person, in the place, in the thing that overwhelms the capacity of the name to fully disclose, without remainder, that which the name signifies or announces.

Derrida pronounced:

That is what an event worthy of the name can and ought to be, an *arrivance* that would surprise me absolutely and to whom or for whom, to which or for which I could not, and may no longer, *not respond*— in a way that is as responsible as possible: what happens, what arrives and comes down upon me, that to which I am exposed, beyond all mastery.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Derrida and Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow*, 52.

The arrival of the other (Master Fard Muhammad) created a spacing wherein autonomy, freedom, and independence can be exercised on the most basic levels. This is accomplished by the other's capacity to frustrate our conventional determinism:

The one who or which comes" exceeds in determinism succeeds also the calculations and strategies of my mastery, my sovereignty, or my autonomy. This is why, even if no one is simply a "free subject," there is in this place something "free," a certain space freedom is open, or in any case is presumed open by the one or which comes, a spacing that is liberated, *dis-engaged* (before and for the pledge [*le gage*], the engagement, the response, the promise, etc.). That is why this figure is linked to all the political questions of sovereignty. It is there that I am exposed and, I dare say, happily vulnerable. Whenever something other [*de l'autre*] can arrive, there is a "to come," there is something of a "future-to-come." With the determinism you spoke of, there is no future.¹¹¹

The transformative event at the heart of the Nation is a radical welcome to God in the person of a stranger, who comes from a height, "a dimension of transcendence whereby he can present himself as a stranger without opposing me as obstacle or enemy."¹¹² The asymmetry of this relation is explained by Levinas:

It resides in the irreversibility of the relation between me and the other, in the Mastery of the Master coinciding with his position as other and as exterior... The interlocutor is not a Thou, he is a You; he reveals himself in lordship. Thus exteriority coincides with a mastery. My freedom is thus challenged by a Master who can invest it. Truth, the sovereign exercise of freedom becomes henceforth possible.¹¹³

How can one's freedom be challenged when one lacks the very freedom that is to be challenged? In the instance of the Nation, the Master invests the freedom and becomes the means by which freedom is established. How can one benefit from the arrival of the Master if one does not have a home from which the Master can be shown hospitality?

¹¹¹ Derrida and Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow*, 52–53.

¹¹² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 215.

¹¹³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 101.

This was the predicament in which Black people found themselves in the 1930s: virtual homelessness.

To extend hospitality to “the Other is to put in question my freedom,”¹¹⁴ but the questioning of Black people’s freedom by the other who arrived was not an interrogation but rather a gift of freedom and a gift of awakening. The establishment of the Muhammadan *cogito* signaled the “awakening of an existence that takes charge of its own condition. But this awakening comes from the other.”¹¹⁵ Elijah Muhammad asserted:

The Black man must be awakened to the knowledge of self - that he is not what the white race has taught him to be. He must come out of this hopeless state. He thinks he is worthless. He should be brought into a state of worthiness and the knowledge and reality of his great place into which Allah, (God) in the Person of Master Fard Muhammad, will put him. He is to place him on top and not the bottom - because the bottom is where he is today - and make him no more the tail, but the head. He is to become the head of civilization of the new world or new heaven or earth. He is not to rule over this people, but he is to be the ruler of self, after the rule of the Caucasian, wicked world.¹¹⁶

The Nation represents the reception or the hospitality of this Master, who arrives with a particular teaching and establishes a society (i.e., the Nation). Remember that the ideal epistemological situation is not *maieutics* but is the arrival from the outside that which “brings me more than I contain.”¹¹⁷ As Levinas elucidated:

Teaching is a discourse in which the master can bring to the student what the student does not yet know. It does not operate as *maieutics*, but continues the placing in me of the idea of Infinity. The idea of Infinity implies a soul capable of containing more than it can draw from itself. It designates an interior being that is capable of a relation with the exterior, and does not take its own interiority for the totality of being.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 85.

¹¹⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 86.

¹¹⁶ Elijah Muhammad, *Our Saviour Has Arrived*, 112.

¹¹⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 51.

¹¹⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 180.

5.11 Conclusion: From the Speaking Face to the Impossible Love Story

The Master comes, not to dominate but to teach.¹¹⁹ This teaching is a discourse, a face-to-face encounter, devoid of “flattery or seduction and hence without violence,”¹²⁰ guaranteeing the maintenance of the interior dwelling of him who welcomes. The difference and the problem with the encounter between the Master Fard Muhammad and Elijah Poole is that the latter had no proverbial *économie* (i.e., home) to maintain. Like the majority of his people, Elijah Poole was *living from* the white man’s Heideggerian “house of being.”¹²¹ Elijah Muhammad reflected on the condition of his people and exclaimed, “You will not even go out of the enemy’s house; nor from the front gate to do something for yourself that he will allow you to do.”¹²² It is in this house, under the power of white oppression, that Black people had been shown inhospitable hospitality. Nevertheless, it is the hostility of Black people that became the focus of researchers and onlookers. We should recall Sahib’s proclaimed perspicacity:

(T)he “hostility to the white race is so deep that they attribute all of their troubles, difficulties and bad luck to the whites... Such bitter feelings and attitudes toward the white man, although they are dominant among Negroes, become essential elements in the agitation and tactics of the cult. This hostility is the central theme and axis of the teachings.”¹²³

The recipients of gratuitous hostility from the white man’s society were accused of the very thing that was meted out to them, as if their return in-kind would not have been both warranted and just. Consequently, it should be of little surprise that the extreme hospitality shown to the stranger, W. D. Fard and his teachings, and hospitality to Black

¹¹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 171.

¹²⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 180.

¹²¹ Žižek, *Violence*, 1–2.

¹²² Elijah Muhammad, *Our Saviour Has Arrived*, 138.

¹²³ Hatim A. Sahib, “The Nation of Islam,” *Contributions in Black Studies* 13/14 (1995/1996): 142, ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst.

people in general went unnoticed. The most Sahib could say Elijah's reception of Fard is that the "confidence of the apostle [Elijah Muhammad] in Fard is really of exceptional character."¹²⁴ Why was this not stated in a manner that conveyed the degree to which the Most Honorable Elijah believed in Master Fard Muhammad? This representation was an absolute understatement and was intentionally articulated in the most mundane terms in an attempt to disassociate the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad from any inkling of religious legitimacy or anything extraordinary. It was an observable fact that Elijah Muhammad had extraordinary faith in Master Fard Muhammad until his departure from among us. This was also another heuristic that was not examined, and yet could have led to something fascinating. Even C. Eric Lincoln had to insist that "true believers 'know' the 'truth' through faith. They know it with their hearts rather than with their minds."¹²⁵ It is not too far to infer that the true believers loved the Nation's teachings, they loved their teacher, and they loved Black people, even if it seemed illogical or unreasonable to the observer. The Nation had been (and is today) a spacing of radical hospitality – a spacing wherein Black people could observe and respond appropriately to the injunction: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself¹²⁶ – a spacing for an impossible possibility.

¹²⁴ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 69.

¹²⁵ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 100.

¹²⁶ Leviticus 19:18, New International Version.

CHAPTER 6.

THE NATION SPEAKS AN IMPOSSIBLE LOVE STORY

The Nation of Islam may be read, theo-philosophically, as one of the great love stories rarely told. This claim may appear startling because the Nation has so often been framed through hatred, rage, separatism, deviance, and monstrosity. Yet if the Nation is encountered through its own face and speech, another story begins to appear: the love W. D. Fard displayed for Black people in Detroit and Chicago, the love between W. D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad, the love Elijah Muhammad bore for Black people, and the love the Nation sought to awaken in Black people for themselves. Even the Nation's emphasis on freedom, justice, and equality may be read as a sign that the Nation has been speaking about love all along.¹

This chapter proceeds in four movements. First, it considers love as the concealed interpretive possibility beneath the dominant frames imposed upon the Nation. Second, it reads the encounter between W. D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad through Badiou's account of love, the Two, and the event. Third, it examines the declaration, fidelity, sacrifice, and duration that emerge from this encounter. Finally, it argues that the Nation's impossible love story extends beyond the Two into a wider community of resurrection, discipline, hospitality, and self-love among Black people.

¹ Caputo seems to suspect that, "All along, whether we have been talking about justice or the gift, forgiveness or hospitality, the topic will have been love." John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 78.

6.1 Love Beneath the Frame: Resurrection, Growth, and Self-Love

The Nation of Islam could very well be the greatest love story ever told. Such a declaration seems to possess an uncanny boldness and may be startling, but so it is with any pronouncement of love's superlative. The dissonance that might be evoked upon encountering the sheer surfeit of such has, to a considerable degree, more to do with the fact that one does not immediately associate love with the Nation of Islam, and to refer to it as the 'greatest love story' seems to be a far too excessive hyperbolization for more moderate and rational tastes. Most would probably contend that the story that is the Nation of Islam is hardly a love story at all. Most would probably contend that, even with all of its positives, the Nation is too idiosyncratic, monstrous, catastrophic, controversial, and/or audacious to be considered an authentic love story. One might even suggest a more palatable rendering of the Nation as a Black Nationalist movement or a social reform movement.² It is important to question and interrogate these privileged presentations of the Nation because they may function as mechanisms to further marginalize and silence less conventional ones. The danger lies in the possibility (and in many cases the likelihood) that the marginalized narratives, views, and perspectives – even those held by the NOI itself – may contribute to a more authentic and/or revelatory understanding of the controversial Nation of Islam. The sentence of expulsion from acceptability is not the result of thorough, objective vetting; rather, it is the effect of said narratives being disharmonious with the assumed ideological backdrop that gives vocal

² See E. U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); and Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930–1980* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984). This view, quite ironically, was actually one that the Nation of Islam developed of itself after 1975 under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad's son, Wallace Muhammad (Warithudeen Muhammad). The apparent aim seems to have been an attempt to rid the NOI of its troublesome and unorthodox theology.

to the more privileged expositions. This should not be taken as a call for a romanticized hermeneutic of the Nation of Islam's history, theology, etc. The claim that the Nation speaks a love story is not a denial of its controversy, severity, disruptive rhetoric, or perceived monstrosity; rather, it is a refusal to allow monstrosification to become the final meaning of the Nation's face. This is a call to leave room for the Nation of Islam in all of its aspects, idiosyncrasies, dynamism, etc. If we are to be committed to pursuing sound and accurate understandings of something as bewildering and awe-inspiring as the Nation, then it is incumbent upon us to be more hospitable to some of these marginalized histories and narratives. By this we are referring to a thinking that does not necessarily require the acceptance of religious dogma.³ One such narrative or thinking that will be touched upon briefly here, but should be further explicated and explored, is the Nation of Islam as a love story.⁴

Love is, contrary to many commonly held views, at the very core of what has become known as "The Nation of Islam." Even a cursory glance or scant analysis could reveal the philosophical, religious, and theological promise of such a reading of the Nation. Even the most philosophically robust and theologically promising constructs of love could easily emerge as fruitful within this unconventional 'read' of the Nation of Islam.⁵ There are numerous constructions of love that could facilitate more-than-tenuous connections that bring to bear authentic and reasonable explanations of the Nation as a

³ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 49. Derrida refers to a "logic" that engenders and links a plethora of themes and meanings that do not require commitment to religious dogma, nor can they be reduced to religious dogma. Instead of serving as a component of religious dogma, it becomes a thinking that does not necessarily rely upon transcendence.

⁴ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 49. What is intended to be conveyed here corresponds to what Derrida identifies in Patocka as "a thinking" that allows an exploration of what may be the very essence of the religious, and it is this "logic of love" that serves a similar, if not the same function (49).

⁵ By putting the Nation of Islam's "Love Narrative" in dialogue with philosophy, which has a love narrative of its own, it seems all too fitting to facilitate a rare (if not impossible) encounter.

function of love.⁶ Even if we considered bell hooks's concept of love as "the will to nurture our own and another's spiritual growth,"⁷ we'd be able to make a substantive love connection, not only to the individual experience of the Nation, but to its communal aspects as well. To evince the veracity of this, one only has to trace the Nation's unmitigated mission to resurrect Black people from a proverbial death⁸ – a death that can only be addressed by a love comparable to what hook conveys in her definition.

In *Tales of Love*, Julia Kristeva presents love as the experience of having one's self-identification (even if momentarily so) reframed, and one's subjectivity captured by a most compelling destiny or *telos*.⁹ This particular concept of love could certainly open up a novel space for fully understanding the nuanced experiences of believers/students¹⁰ in the NOI, who seem to derive a new sense of Self and a new sense of destiny as a part of their NOI matriculation.¹¹ This is the sort of experience that each believer-student has,

⁶ Upon first glance, any association of love with the Nation of Islam seems overtly pretentious and smacks of the beginnings of a definitional retreat or a conceptual equivocation, but this may be a premature response. It is believed that a head-on encounter with various constructions of love would actually open up new invigorated discourses about and within the Nation of Islam.

⁷ bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow, 2018), 4. She writes: "I spent years reaching for a meaningful definition of the word 'love,' and was deeply relieved when I found one in psychiatrist M. Scott Peck's classic self-help book *The Road Less Traveled*, first published in 1978. Echoing the work of Erich Fromm, he defines love as "the will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth."

⁸ See "The Muslim Program," Nation of Islam, point no. 5, accessed November 9, 2015, <https://www.noi.org/muslim-program/>.

⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 5–6. She writes: "Love is the time and space in which 'I' assumes the right to be extraordinary. Sovereign yet not individual. Divisible, lost, annihilated; but also, and through imaginary fusion with the loved one, equal to the infinite space of superhuman psychism. Paranoid? I am, in love, at the zenith of subjectivity... Love and the loved one erase the reckoning of time... The *call*, its call, overwhelms me with a flow in which the upheavals of the body (what people call emotions) are mingled with a whirling thought, as vague, supple, ready to pierce or to wed the other's as it is vigilant, alert, lucid in its impetus... toward what? Toward a destiny as relentless and blind as biological programming, as the course of the species."

¹⁰ The designation *believer/student* is connotative of the ideal disposition of a member of the Nation of Islam: in addition to being a believer he/she is also to be a student. This is explicitly apparent as all major laborers of the Nation of Islam have the designation "student" placed in front of any title (e.g., Student Regional Minister, Student Regional Captain, etc.).

¹¹ These experiences are documented in the works of Erdmann E. Beynon (1938), Hatim A. Sahib (1951), and E.U. Essien-Udom (1962). Nevertheless, such testimonials were usually minimized as too religiously subjective and not given much weight in terms of analyses of the NOI.

or strives to have, within the spatial and temporal context called the Nation of Islam, wherein each seeks to appropriate and respond to a compelling spiritual and educational adventure. Essentially the Nation becomes for the believer/student a catalyst for a heightened existential awareness that has had extraordinary effects on the lives of ordinary men and women; and in this sense, it was and has been a bona fide love experience.

6.2 The Neighborhood of Love: The Nation as Shared World

If the Nation is to be taken seriously as an authentic love narrative, then it would have to display certain features that are symptomatic of love's internal structures and dynamics. Kenneth Reinhard describes love as "the decision to create a new open set, to knot two interiorities into a new logic of world, a new *neighborhood*."¹² This *neighborhood* can easily become a referent to the signified *Nation*, and thus an entire trove of understanding would open up; because *the Nation* is that space (i.e. neighborhood) wherein believers/students (i.e. neighbors) are called to love one another, just as Jesus commands in the Bible: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22: 37–39; John 15:17), thus establishing the kingdom as a realized eschatology. One finds this same impetus and ethic at the core of the Nation of Islam, but what is even more intriguing is how this love narrative begins and unfolds.

¹² Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 66. Kenneth Reinhard's discussion of Alain Badiou's views on love: "A neighborhood is an *open* area in a world: a place, subset, or element where there is no boundary, no difference, between the inside of the thing and the thing itself. Similarly, an element can belong to a set without being included in that set; there can still be a something that demarcates a difference between it and the set itself. That is, merely to be on the inside of something is not the same as being included in or interior to that thing or community."

At the annual NOI Saviours' Day Convention¹³ one cannot help but notice two portraits on the stage. One is of the Nation's founder, Master Fard Muhammad (W.D. Fard), and the other is of his student, the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad. These two portraits serve as a looming background of the stage. It should be noted that the portraits are not of W.D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad together. The portraits are two separate portraits that are brought together. This becomes significant for the concept of disjunction found within Badiou's conceptualization of love. If every love story begins with an initial cataclysm, a coming together, that signals the commencement of the love process, then these two – Fard and Elijah- constitute *the Two* that represent the commencement of the Nation's love narrative.



Figure 1. Saviours' Day 1995. Minister Louis Farrakhan delivers the Saviours' Day address, *Jesus Saves: Who Will Save the Black Man?*, Chicago, Illinois, February 25, 1995. Source: Final Call Store.¹⁴

¹³ "Saviours' Day," Nation of Islam, accessed June 19, 2016, <https://noi.org/about-saviours-day/>. According to the Nation of Islam's web site: "Saviours' Day is an annual Nation of Islam commemoration of the birth of Master Fard Muhammad, the Great Madhi of the Muslims and the Messiah of the Christians...."

¹⁴ Final Call Store, "Jesus Saves: Saviours' Day 1995," Final Call, Inc., accessed July 9, 2021, <https://store.finalcall.com/product/jesus-saves-saviours-day-1995/>.

6.3 The Two: W. D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad

In his book *Conditions*, Alain Badiou argues that it is best to approach love as a process that is marked by the advent (*ad-venue*) of *the Two*, which has its origins in the event-encounter.¹⁵ Elsewhere he goes on to assert that "love contains an initial element that separates, dislocates and differentiates. You have *Two*. Love involves *Two*."¹⁶ Accordingly, it is from the appearance of this *Two* that we gain the seminal advent of the Nation's love story: the encounter. Alireza Nurbakhsh, Master of the Nimatullahi Order of Sufis, citing Rumi's exegesis of the Qur'anic story of Moses, emphasizes the nature of the encounter between divinity and humanity as distinct from that of human-to-human love, stating:

The point is that once the encounter happens, one begins his or her journey on the path of divine love. How is this love different from love between human beings? In Rumi's story God tells Moses that what He wants is a "burning heart" not mere words and expressions. If we take the expression of burning heart to be our guide here, then divine love refers to a mode of loving rather than a love that is defined in terms of its object. What makes our love divine is not what we love, but the way we love what we love.¹⁷

Despite his negative views of the Nation, Hatim Sahib could not help but recognize the obvious truth that the "confidence of the apostle [Elijah Muhammad] in Fard is really of exceptional character."¹⁸ Even C. Eric Lincoln had to admit that the heart and faith of the believers stood at the base of their religious conviction.¹⁹ There is a restless love story operating underneath the surface (presentations) of the Nation.

¹⁵ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008), 189.

¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (New York: The New Press, 2012), 28.

¹⁷ Alireza Nurbakhsh (Reza Ali Shah), "Divine Love," Nimatullahi Sufi Order, accessed April 30, 2022, <https://www.nimatullahi.org/divine-love/>. Alireza further states, "It appeared to me that Rumi had unraveled a deep mystery of divine love: in order to love God, one does not need to have a correct conception or description of God; what is required is a burning heart."

¹⁸ Hatim A. Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," *Contributions in Black Studies* 13/14 (1995/1996): 69, ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst.

¹⁹ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 100.

Badiou maintains that "(l)ove always starts with an encounter," which is comprised of all of the mundane, risky, contingent, historical features, and yet it carries within it something outside the natural order.²⁰ Likewise, the inaugural event of the Nation of Islam's love story can be traced back to the initial encounter of one Elijah Poole – a Georgia-born son of a sharecropper – and one W.D. Fard – an Arab-born stranger and teacher.

6.4 The Encounter: Elijah Poole Meets the Stranger

The Nation of Islam has its beginning on July 4, 1930, in Detroit, when a stranger who was peddling wares began soliciting door-to-door. While his pretense was the selling of silks and other wares, W.D. Fard pursued his primary objective by stoking his customers' interests in his teachings about their brothers and sisters in the East. Fard began teaching privately in the homes of Black Detroiters and then invited them to welcome friends, family, and neighbors to come hear his teachings about Black people's glorious past and future. This strategy worked extremely well and eventually the budding "Nation of Islam" meetings swelled with eager listeners and packed rented halls. In 1931 a momentous encounter took place, one that would have a tremendous impact on African-American history. Elijah Poole, one of the tens of thousands of migrants to Detroit, had heard about this mysterious man and at the behest of his wife Clara, he decided to attend one of this mysterious man's meetings. Unfortunately, he was not able to gain entrance the first time, due to the sheer number of attendees and the limited space. Elijah made a second attempt, only to encounter the same problem. He was, nevertheless, able to hear enough from outside the meeting hall to become thoroughly impressed and resolved to

²⁰ Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 28.

meet the speaker. Elijah, like so many attendees, stood in the long line to shake the speaker's hand. He did not know that this face-to-face encounter would elicit a confession that would become the impetus for one of the most significant religious movements in North America. As he searched his mind for the words to share with Fard, he very likely did not weigh the fortuitous nature of this, nor is it likely that he considered this moment to be a rendezvous with destiny. He could not have known that this encounter, that this meeting, as benign and mundane as it perhaps seemed on the surface, would be the most pregnant moment of his life. This moment would actually become the basis upon which many whom he loved and trusted would betray him and turn against him. His own blood-brother, Khalat, would become one of his most ardent opponents. He was not able to see the years that he would spend on the run for his life, only to have that time followed by increased harassment from local and federal authorities and an eventual imprisonment for three years in a Federal prison in Milan, Michigan.

6.5 Radical Hospitality and the Arrival of the Stranger

The appearance of these two (*the Two*) on the historical stage signaled a beginning that was nothing short of a "love-at-first-sight" drama.²¹ Elijah Muhammad recalls this encounter:

When I met him, I looked at him and he...well, it just came to me like this, that this is the Son of Man that the Bible says that will, (or) prophesies that will come in the last days of the world and that I couldn't get that out of me. And I shook hands with him and I said to him, "You are the one the Bible prophesies that will come at the end of the world under the name 'Son of Man,' under the name "the second coming of Jesus," and so he looked at me a little stern and smiled and he put his head down beside my

²¹ Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 29. Badiou states: "The encounter between two differences is an event, is contingent and disconcerting, 'love's surprises' theatre yet again. On the basis of this event, love can start and flourish" (29).

head and then whispered in my ear and said these words: "Yes, I am the one but who knows that but yourself?"²²

Elijah Poole recognized this stranger as 'the one' – the fulfillment of his life's longing and messianic expectations. The coming of this stranger demanded a radical hospitality. On the relationship between the flourishing of love and radical hospitality or openness to the stranger, Derrida expounded:

...(T)he stranger, here the awaited guest, is not only someone to whom you say "come," but "enter," enter without waiting, make a pause in our home without waiting, hurry up and come in, "come inside," "come within me," not only toward me, but within me: occupy me, take place in me, which means, by the same token, also take my place, don't content yourself with coming to meet me or "into my home." Crossing the threshold is entering and not only approaching or coming. Strange logic, but so enlightening for us, that of an impatient master awaiting his guest as a liberator, his emancipator. It is *as if* the stranger or foreigner held the keys. This is always the situation of the foreigner in politics too, that of coming as a legislator to lay down the law and liberate the people or nation by coming from the outside, by entering into the nation or the house, into the home that lets him enter after having appealed to him. It's *as if* (and an *as if* always lays down the law here) the stranger— some Oedipus, in fact, in other words the one whose guarded secret about the place of death was going to save the city or promise it salvation... *as if*, then, the stranger could save the master and liberate the power of his host; it's *as if* the master, qua master, were prisoner of his place and his power, of his ipseity, of his subjectivity (his subjectivity is hostage).²³

Smitten, Elijah Muhammad goes on to describe how he experienced this encounter in relation to his religious and spiritual yearning: "When I heard the teachings of Islam from the mouth of Mr. W.D. Fard, I said, 'this is the salvation that I was praying for; it came out to me in person.'"²⁴ Levinas asked a very key question about this encounter, "Has

²² Elijah Muhammad, "Buzz Anderson Interview Part 1," YouTube video, 1:16–2:19, posted by TruthControversy, August 4, 2021, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6IL4Uniy58>

²³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 123, 125.

²⁴ Sahib, "The Nation of Islam," 70.

love no other term than a person?”²⁵ This face-to-face demonstrates “how in love transcendence goes both further and less far than language.”²⁶

I did not need to read any book about it because my education is limited. But the prophecy was very clear that this is the truth. I prayed to Allah for his favor after I heard Fard for the first time. We began to hold meetings together at night in our house discussing what we can learn and heard from Mr. Fard. We were real happy. I used to go to my clothes closet and pray to Fard who brought us the truth that I was going to hear. I used to read the lives of the prophets and their histories and prophesy. And I used to say that if I live to see God when he comes to set up righteousness that I pray that I will be one that he accepts, and I would like to point him out that these are the people who mistreated my people all my life and all the life of my parents.²⁷

6.6 The Event: Hostage, Hospitality, and the Naming of the Beloved

Elijah seems (even retrospectively) to have always been anxiously awaiting the arrival of this stranger, this Liberator, a Savior, and Answer to his supplications as well as those of his people. His encounter with W.D. Fard, although nothing extraordinary on the surface, would make such a deep impression on him (similar to what Julia Kristeva pronounced earlier) that his entire existential schemata would become completely disconcerted and his life forever changed. This is the *sine qua non* of the event according to Žižek.²⁸

The stranger, W. D. Fard, comes, liberates, and takes the Honorable Elijah Muhammad as an emotional and intellectual hostage. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad hosts, is held hostage by, and is compelled to show hospitality to this stranger.²⁹ This is the phenomenological and internal structure of the creation of *the Two*. The resulting bond evinces a long-term love, not a mere, transient entanglement. The bond of *the Two*

²⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 254.

²⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 254.

²⁷ Sahib, “The Nation of Islam,” 70.

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 3.

²⁹ See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 125.

is characterized by this hostage taking, which signals the inseparability and durability of this newly formed/forming bond. Elijah Muhammad's own words describe this dynamic quite explicitly in his interview with Buzz Anderson:

I was with him for three years— night and day. I didn't do anything, and he didn't allow me to do anything. He taught me for three years, night and day, seven days a week. I mean I was confined; I was jailed almost. I had no chance to do anything but just to listen to him. (Interviewer interjects: And learn). That's right, and he would carry me out of the city sometimes in his little Chevrolet coupe and we would sit out there sometimes two or three hours at night, and he would talk to me about the stars and planets, and how long this was making and what not...³⁰

Elsewhere Elijah Muhammad narrated this same experience with W.D. Fard:

He used to teach me night and day. We used to sit sometimes from the early part of the night until sunrise and after sunrise, all night long for about two years or more. He was with us three years and a little better, and I was constantly around him, and he was constantly teaching me of things of Islam and what is to come and what was before. This is the way we began.³¹

The ramifications of this encounter had the sort of structure and disorienting and reorienting impact that is undoubtedly indicative of an authentic love encounter – the kind that leaves us completely in awe, discombobulated, unable to find our footing, and so we ‘fall.’ The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek captures this experience and its capacity to disorientate and re-orientate our lives in his animated description:

... all of a sudden in a totally contingent way, let's say you stumble on the street, somebody helps you to stand up... And, of course, it's the love of your life. A totally contingent encounter, but the result can be that your whole life changes. 'Nothing is the same,' as they say. You even spontaneously perceive your entire past life as leading towards this unique moment... You encounter something which is totally contingent but the

³⁰ Elijah Muhammad, “Buzz Anderson Interview Part 1,” YouTube video, 43:59–45:00, posted by TruthControversy, August 4, 2021, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6IL4Uniy58>.

³¹ Elijah Muhammad, “Buzz Anderson Interview Part 1,” YouTube video, 6:05–6:48, posted by TruthControversy, August 4, 2021, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6IL4Uniy58>

result of it, if you accept it as an event, is that your entire life changes. It's a different story.³²

A different life and story unfold, indeed! Elijah Muhammad had stumbled and perhaps fallen on the proverbial streets of America, and it was this stranger (W.D. Fard) who saw his condition and helped him stand up, and of course it was the Love of his life. What begins to unfold is a love encounter that initiates the type of signification and meaning that evades naming, but nevertheless demands a naming that dignifies the perceived reality in the encounter. Derrida's ponders this encounter and echoes the arduous nature of this demand:

Does it begin with the question addressed to the newcomer (which seems very human and sometimes loving, assuming that hospitality should be linked to love— an enigma that we will leave in reserve for the moment): what is your name? Tell me your name, what should I call you, I who am calling on you, I who want to call you by your name? What am I going to call you? It is also what we sometimes tenderly ask children and those we love.³³

Elijah Muhammad, seemingly experienced the very same thing with Fard:

I asked him, "Who are you, and what is your real name?" He said, "I am the one that the world has been expecting for the past 2,000 years." I said to Him again, "What is your name?" He said, "My name is Mahdi; I am God, I came to guide you into the right path that you may be successful and see the hereafter."³⁴

The advent of the Nation of Islam certainly hinges upon this love-encounter. It is this encounter that creates the aforementioned *Two*, but the encounter is only the beginning of a much more nuanced process. Badiou even admits that he has "always been

³² Slavoj Žižek, "Events and Encounters Explain Our Fear of Falling in Love," interview by Big Think, November 30, 2015, YouTube video, 3:15–5:16, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXqPIYWJSII>.

³³ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 27, 29. "Or else does hospitality begin with the unquestioning welcome, in a double effacement, the effacement of the question *and* the name?" (29).

³⁴ Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman* (Chicago, IL: Muhammad's Temple No. 2, 1965), 17.

interested in issues of duration and process, and not only starting-points."³⁵ This disposition is advantageous because it is the durability of the love process that 'curbs' chance and dignifies what, on the surface, could be random and insignificant as a transformative beginning of a more durable process.³⁶ He asserts that "(L)ove isn't simply about two people meeting and their inward-looking relationship: it is a construction, a life that is being made, no longer from the perspective of One but from the perspective of Two. And that is what I have called a 'Two scene'".³⁷

6.7 The Two Scene: Disjunction, Unity, and Transformation

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad (HEM) expressed this very *Twoness* in one of his 1973 table talks:

I'll tell you what He [W. D. Fard] said. This is not Elijah here sitting here boasting, oh no. No, no. This is what He said. You [are] in it and the Holy Qur'an backs him up. Allah really talks to him as though they're together – what more do you want? The *two* is together, *both* of them– that you can't get nothing between them; he runs up and down *in double* there... think over that! [emphasis mine]³⁸

This shared space creates the conditions for *the Two* to be *as One*. It is imperative that the *Two* do not get lost in the One, and it is important that the One does not get lost in the Two. The designation “as one” becomes a very crucial grammatical distinction because it maintains the disjunction of *the Two* within the One, while giving way to a unity. “*Love fractures the One*,” Badiou insists, “in accordance to the Two. And it is on this basis that it can be thought that, although worked over by the disjunction, the situation is exactly as

³⁵ Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 29.

³⁶ Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 40–42.

³⁷ Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 29.

³⁸ Elijah Muhammad, *Table Talks of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad: The Transcripts*, vol. 1, ed. Sultan R. Muhammad and The Honorable Elijah Muhammad Table Talks Project Work Group (Chicago, IL: Muhammad Center Publishing, 2012), 126.

if there is a One, and that it is through this One-multiple that all truth is assured.”³⁹ The Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan actually seems to have detected this very dynamic and articulated his view during the same table talk. Minister Farrakhan, responding to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad’s discourse on his encounter with W.D. Fard, offered this exposition:

Minister Louis Farrakhan (MLF): Dear Apostle, Dear Holy Apostle, (Master Fard Muhammad) being with you for three and a half years...

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad (HEM): Near three and a half years.

MLF: ...Yes, sir. He put himself in you. I’ve heard your mother, Dear Apostle, one day say and I shall never forget this. Mother Marie Muhammad, in this little room right here, she said, “He is not the same man that I borned (sic) in this world.” She said, “Allah made him over with His own hands.” And she was saying that you looked- in other words- that you were just not the same child that she gave birth to. That something had happened to you since Master Fard Muhammad had taught you. And to me it was just like He nursed you right up into Himself and made you fall in love with Him so completely that you didn’t want yourself – you wanted Him, and when you didn’t want yourself...

HEM: He said that better than I could. That’s right, Brother. He explained it right.

MLF: And so, the self of Elijah died and accepted the Self of God. And He came into you, and you became as One. And He planted in you the germ, the seed of Himself and then conditions...all of your sufferings...nourished that which He put in you, until now you are matured in Him. And we have Him standing and sitting and walking and thinking for us in you.⁴⁰

6.8 The Word Bond of Love: Declaration, Fidelity, and Sacrifice

This is at the heart of the Nation’s *Two scene*. Within any *Two scene* there has to be a dramatic declaration of love that carries with it a fervor designed to carry *the Two*

³⁹ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008), 189.

⁴⁰ Elijah Muhammad, *Table Talks of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad*, 1:128.

away or that indicates their being carried away. It is the declaration of love that gives clear indication of the *eventuality* of the love process that is ensuing. This is a very important feature because it is what signifies the substantive nature of the love encounter, delivering it from being mere happenstance to the promise of the advent of true, sustained love. Badiou concurs with this assessment, insisting that the "declaration of love marks the transition from chance to destiny..."⁴¹ He insists that the "advent (*ad-venue*) of the hypothesis of a 'Two' is eventual in origin. The event is that hazardous supplement we call an encounter. The event-encounter only consists in the form of its disappearance, of its eclipse. It is fixed only through a naming, and this naming constitutes a declaration of love. The name it declares is drawn from the void of the site from which the encounter draws the little bit of being of its supplement."⁴² He goes on to explain what actually happens when someone declares their love to their beloved:

The simplest words become charged with an intensity that is almost intolerable. To make a declaration of love is to move on from the event-encounter to embark upon a construction of truth. The chance nature of the encounter morphs into the assumption of a beginning. And often what starts there lasts so long, is so charged with novelty and experience of the world that in retrospect it doesn't seem at all random and contingent, as it appeared initially, but almost a necessity.⁴³

In a very explicit expression of this love, W.D. Fard proclaimed to Elijah Muhammad,

"Now, I'm here and I want you to know...I love you, and my father made me for you."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 43.

⁴² Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, 188.

⁴³ Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 42–43.

⁴⁴ Elijah Muhammad, "Buzz Anderson Interview Part 1," YouTube video, 12:46–12:55, posted by TruthControversy, August 4, 2021, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6IL4Uniy58>. This "I am Here" or "Here, I am" statement has a profound correlation to Levinas's language about manifestation and disclosure. "When in the presence of the Other, I say, 'Here I am!'", this "Here I am!" is the place through which the Infinite enters into language, but without giving itself to be seen. Since it is not thematized, in any case originally, it does not appear. The 'invisible God' is not to be understood as God invisible to the senses, but as God non-thematizable in thought, and nonetheless as non-indifferent to the thought, which is not thematization, and probably not

Not only does this profession hint at the necessity of their encounter and the subsequent formation of the “Two scene,” but it also introduces the idea that there is something – generally a purpose, a truth, a life – beyond “the Two” encounter that nevertheless bears witness to the event. The encounter is only a beginning and must be only the beginning; Love cannot thrive if *the Two* remain stuck in a state of paralysis from the weight of the encounter alone. Badiou warns us:

... love cannot be reduced to the first encounter, because it is a construction. The enigma in thinking about love is the duration of time necessary for it to flourish. In fact, it isn't the ecstasy of those beginnings that is remarkable. The latter are clearly ecstatic, but love is above all a construction that lasts.⁴⁵

Naturally, the full culmination of love is deferred and therefore the episteme of this love's intensity has to rely almost entirely upon the declaration at the beginning. Here is where we find the expressed extent to which there is commitment to the unfolding love process, but only in the form of what appears to be more like a promise, one that engenders fidelity and commitment. This fidelity, while resting upon *the Two* scene, certainly extends beyond it to truth that includes a multitude of *others*. It is said that one day in 1932 or 1933 Fard told Elijah (whose name at that time was Elijah Karriem), "Come on Karriem. We got about all we are going to get." Elijah broke down and exclaimed: "Master, if you destroy them, destroy me."⁴⁶ It is reported that Fard said that

even an intentionality...Thus, in the "Here I am!" of the approach of the Other, the Infinite does not show itself. How then does it take on meaning? I will say that the subject who says, "Here I am!" *testifies* to the Infinite. It is through this testimony, whose truth is not the truth of representation or perception that the revelation of the Infinite occurs" (from Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 106). This would be fertile ground to excavate the depths of NOI theology, particularly the formula that ‘Allah Came in the Person of Master Fard Muhammad.’

⁴⁵ Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 31–32.

⁴⁶ Jabril Muhammad, “A Valuable Black Man, pt. 9: Minister Farrakhan Sits in the Seat of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad,” *The Final Call*, September 29, 2007, accessed December 19, 2015, http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Columns_4/Minister_Farrakhan_sits_in_the_seat_of_the_Honorable_3967.shtml

he "loved us (the so-called Negroes), his lost and found, so well that he would eat rattlesnakes to free us if necessary..."⁴⁷ In the following highly charged exchange between Fard and Elijah, the excesses expressed here are in keeping with what's expecting from *the Two*:

Tell them that I (W.D. Fard) have come for them. Tell them that I will walk up in a mountain 40 miles to teach just one of them. Tell them, Elijah, I love them! They have been here 400 years, and there is none that has befriended them. "I Am their God," He said, "and I love them. I will destroy the Nations of the Earth, to save them and then die Myself." And I (Elijah Muhammad) said, "I'll do the same." I said, "I can't destroy the Nations, but I will die trying to teach them." He (Allah) looked at me and smiled. He said, "Yes." He said, "You will do that." He looked at me some more. He said, "Yes, He will give his life."⁴⁸

This willingness to go to such extremes, even to the point of death, is indicative of the degree and nature of the love that *the Two* produced. W.D. Fard, a stranger, was willing to give his life to address and transform the condition of Black people (the so-called American Negro) and the same was engendered in his student, Elijah Muhammad. For Elijah Muhammad, this exchange is parallel to the incarnated Transcendent Other (God) who, out of infinite love, comes right into the vicissitudes of life to sacrifice His own life, or rather to offer a gift of death – a true gift that sets up the conditions for responsibility and dignify the absolute irreplaceability of the beloved:

On what condition is responsibility possible? On what condition does goodness exist beyond all calculation? On the condition that goodness forget itself, that the movement be a movement of the gift that renounces itself, hence a movement of infinite love. Only infinite love can renounce itself and come in order to *become* finite, become incarnated in order to love the other as a finite other. This gift of infinite love comes from someone and is addressed to someone; responsibility demands irreplaceable singularity. Yet only death or rather the apprehension of

⁴⁷ Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 17.

⁴⁸ Elijah Muhammad, *The True History of Elijah Muhammad: Messenger of Allah*, vol. 1, ed. Nasir Makr Hakim (Atlanta, GA: M.E.M.P.S. Publications, 1997), 50; Elijah Muhammad, *Our Saviour Has Arrived* (Chicago: Muhammad's Temple No. 2, 1974), 36.

death can give this irreplaceability, and it is only on the basis of it that one can speak of a responsible subject, the soul as conscience of self, of myself, etc.

6.9 From the Two to the Nation: Love, Infinity, and the Third

While this love story may begin with *the Two*, it is not relegated to them and its procedural effects extend beyond the 'Two' to create the following numericity: One, Two, Infinity.⁴⁹ Here this *infinity* represents the capacity of the encounter-event of the "Two" to extend its truth production beyond the *Two* love encounter. While Badiou rejects the usage of a *Third*,⁵⁰ I would like to utilize it here to represent the extension of the truth produced from the *Two* that extends the infinity of the *Two* to Others. This *Third* is not a position within the love structure; rather, it represents dissemination of the *Two* situation, necessitating that the Truth of the *Two* be made possible for others.⁵¹ Consequently it is a part of the same formula that constitutes the love structure of *the Two*.⁵² This becomes the

⁴⁹ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, 189.

⁵⁰ Alain Badiou maintains that a "Third" is impossible because there are only two positions: One and Two. Infinity represents the innumerable ways that the *Two* can infinitely configure and disseminate the truth of the originary *Two*. See Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, "The idea of a third position engages the function of the imaginary: this involves the angel... What makes it possible here for me, then, to announce this disjunction, that is, without having recourse to any angel, without acting as an angel? It is the requirement that the situation, which is not adequate in itself, is supplemented. Not by a third structural position but by a singular event. This event is what initiates the amorous procedure, and we might agree to call it an *encounter*." (183–184).

⁵¹ This concept is taken from Levinas's view of the 'Third Party.' It is congruent to this discussion of love and is succinctly articulated by Alphonso Lingis (in Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1997), xli. "The entry of a third party is not simply a multiplication of the other; from the first the third is simultaneously other than the other and makes me one among others. This alterity is itself first ethical, and not simply numerical; it is a relation of appeal and contestation. To find that the one before whom and for whom I am responsible is responsible in his turn before and for another is not to find his order put on me relativized or cancelled. It is to discover the exigency for justice, for an order among responsibilities. And the entry of the third party, treating me as an other alongside of the other I faced, first institutes a kind of common terrain among us. I am, thanks to him, someone to be concerned about, someone to answer for" (xli).

⁵² This point is captured and further nuanced by Levinas in *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*: "The third party is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow. . . . The other stands in a relationship with the third, for whom I cannot entirely answer, even if I alone answer, before any question, for my neighbor. The other and the third party, my neighbors, contemporaries of one another, put distance between me and the other and the third party. 'Peace, peace to the neighbor and the one far-off' (Isaiah 57:19)—we now understand the point of this apparent rhetoric."

basis of the would-be community that is being called into existence based on that love. This *Third* should not be viewed as an intruder, but the infinite possibilities of the originary love being inclusive, also as if it were always meant to be, just as it was for *the Two*. I would identify this as constituting the fundamental component of and condition for the formation of the aforementioned Neighborhood or in this case *Nation*.⁵³

Love becomes the construction of a world, a truth from *the Two*. Luce Irigaray's conceptualization of love in *The Way of Love*, purports a similar idea that love is the condition that allows the one and the other—two worlds that are open and relational—to interpenetrate, transmute, and transubstantiate one another and thereby create a new shared space-time or world.⁵⁴ Yes, it is love that has sparked this space (in time) called the Nation of Islam.

The Bible identifies the greatest love as one wherein one's life is laid down for a beloved friend (John 15:13), and if this can be identified as the qualifying element that makes a love narrative fit for the superlative "greatest," then it could be more than valid to identify the NOI as the 'greatest love story.' Within the heart of the Nation's love narrative is the highest commitment and demonstration of love—the sacrificing of one's own life for the sake of others. This certainly uncovers the scope of the love commitment disseminated

Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1997), 157.

⁵³ See Kenneth Reinhard, "Toward a Political Theology of the Neighbor," in Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 66–67. Kenneth Reinhard's explication of Alain Badiou's views on love.

⁵⁴ Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček (London: Continuum, 2002), 10–11. Irigaray asserts: "Thus, never a completeness of the One, but constitution of two worlds open and in relation with one another, and which give birth to a third world as work in common and space-time to be shared. . . . The one and the other interpenetrate and transmute each other such that the dichotomy between them no longer exists. The fixed polarities of the one, of the One, return to the duality of subjectivities which, with a view to their human becoming and in the name of the wisdom of love, renounce all completed personal fullness in order to work toward a more accomplished advent of humanity."

throughout the Nation. This willingness to lay down one's life for the cause of resurrecting, redeeming, saving the downtrodden, the rejected and the despised is what comprises the axiological core of the Nation and is an inextricable value in the spiritual/religious adventure to which the NOI invites all. This theoretical claim also clarifies why the Nation's love ethic can be difficult to perceive from the outside, even when it is deeply familiar to those formed within its world. Nevertheless, the resultant love is constitutive of this invitation to this adventure, as Badiou claims:

We could say that love is a tenacious adventure. The adventure side is necessary, but equally so is the need for tenacity. To give up at the first hurdle, the first serious disagreement, the first quarrel, is only to distort love. Real love is one that triumphs lastingly, sometimes painfully, over the hurdles erected by time, space, and the world.⁵⁵

This tenacious love has been very much surging through the heart of the Nation as it has endured the pitfalls, tragedies and hurdles and has worked to make its foundational "word bond"⁵⁶ over its protracted history of 90 years.

During the 2000 winter term of my doctoral coursework at the Chicago Theological Seminary, I took a course, *Augustine, Niebuhr and Malcolm X* with Dr. JoAnne Terrell and in her opening remarks to the class, she described the Nation of Islam as having a central *love* ethic. Although I had been a member of the Nation of Islam for almost seven years, this idea took me a bit by surprise. My dissonance had more to do with the context. I was not used to the Nation being framed in these terms outside of the

⁵⁵ Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, 31–32.

⁵⁶ Fard Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom Lessons* (Chicago: The Final Call, 1995), 14. This euphemism is taken from the lesson: "(Questioner): Have you not learned that your word shall be bond regardless to whom or what? (Responder): Yes. My word is bond and bond is life and I will give my life before my word shall fail."

Nation of Islam itself. Little did I know that this would plant a seed that would germinate over almost two decades.

6.10 The Impossible Love Story Beneath the Veil

If the face of the Nation is allowed to be itself and to express itself, it can certainly testify on its own behalf that it is undoubtedly a love story. A face-to-face encounter would certainly allow for a re-reading of the Nation's history and narrative, and another (i.e., literally an *other*) story begins to speak, one that is overwhelmingly disruptive, out-of-joint, violent and monstrous even.⁵⁷ This actually allows this oft-repeated topic to take on new expression – expression that makes the retelling anew, and thus maintains the capacity of the story, as that of *le tout autre* (the wholly other), to surprise.⁵⁸ This can be held in direct contrast to the established narratives that seem so committed to repeating and reducing the Nation almost to the point that a certain boredom becomes inevitable. Hence, the Nation's image as a separatist, Black nationalist, anti-white, anti-Semitic, quasi-religious, homophobic, hate group has a totalizing effect and begins to take on the force of proper names for the Nation.⁵⁹ The result of this is that the Nation is equated to thematizations that make love an estranged impossibility, but love doesn't have to be interjected into the Nation – it is already very much at home, permeating its history, solidifying its structure, and fueling its mission.

The possibility of love is part of the Nation's alterity and true monstrosity, not in the sense of moral deformity, but in the Derridean sense of that which appears

⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis, ed. Giacomo Donis and David Webb (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 47.

⁵⁸ Derrida and Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, 47.

⁵⁹ Derrida and Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, 9.

unexpectedly, disrupts the norm, and exposes the history of the norm itself. The Nation's love story is an impossible love story because of the frames, the master algorithms that have worked to veil such a possibility in plain sight. Many read about the Nation and never realized that they have just glossed over one of *the greatest love stories never told* or at the very least, *hardly ever told*. It seems impossible to not have an investigative interest in the drama that ensued with W.D. Fard displaying such love and concern for Black people in Detroit and Chicago in the 1930s. At the very least love has to be a *possibility* in order to make sense of this history. The love between W.D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad, the love of Elijah Muhammad for Black people, and the love Elijah Muhammad attempted to engender in Black people for themselves have to be recognized as a part of the face of the Nation. I agree with the suspicion of Caputo, and I paraphrase him here: whether we have been talking about freedom, justice, equality, or hospitality, we really have been talking about love all along.⁶⁰

6.11 Conclusion: From Framing to Love

This dissertation has argued that the Nation of Islam has been subjected to forms of epistemic, representational, and theo-philosophical violence that have distorted, veiled, and attempted to neutralize its Levinasian face. The dominant frames examined in this study did not merely misdescribe the Nation; they helped construct an image of the Nation as hateful, deviant, monstrous, and unworthy of authentic encounter. In this sense, framing became violence. It substituted a manufactured image for the Nation's self-expression, covered over its face, and made its own speech difficult, if not impossible, to hear. What emerged through these frames was not the Nation itself, but a monstrosified

⁶⁰ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 78.

image of the Nation, one designed to foreclose encounter before the Nation could appear as a religious other who speaks.

The task of this work has not been to deny the Nation's controversy, complexity, or difficulty. Rather, it has been to argue that critique must come after encounter, not before it. To approach the Nation responsibly requires a pre-methodological hospitality that precedes classification, judgment, and method. Such hospitality does not eliminate critique, nor does it require uncritical acceptance. It requires that the Nation be allowed to appear through its own face and speech before being reduced to the frames imposed upon it. In this way, pre-methodological hospitality resists the violence of monstrosification by refusing to judge the other through images that have already foreclosed the possibility of understanding.

When the Nation is encountered through its own face and speech, what emerges is not merely a story of nationalism, separatism, rage, or resistance. What emerges is an impossible love story: the love of W. D. Fard for Black people, the love between Fard and Elijah Muhammad, the love Elijah Muhammad bore for Black people, and the love the Nation sought to awaken in Black people for themselves. This love does not make the Nation less disruptive. It may, in fact, be the very source of its disruptive alterity. Beneath the veil of monstrosification, the Nation speaks as a face that calls for justice, discourse, responsibility, and love. Thus, the movement of this dissertation has been from framing to violence, from violence to the face, from the face to monstrosification, from monstrosification to pre-methodological hospitality, and finally from the Nation's own speech to the impossible love story that has been there all along.

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