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## Imprisoned Imaginaries: Whiteness and Nation of Islam

**Sadhana Bery**

University of Massachusetts

*White supremacy, through its control of epistemic and ontological conditions, colonizes the social imaginaries of nonwhite antiracist movements, imprisoning them within the racial onto-epistemic regime of whiteness. I argue that by reworking, rather than rejecting, racial ideologies, the movements authenticate and enforce racial thinking that complies with the naturalized and normalized racial/racist logics of whiteness. They get ensnared within the contradiction of liberation/entrapment: between the liberating potential of an antiracist and self-affirming ideology and entrapment within the falsity and limitations of an ideology based on race. This article uses Nation of Islam, a Black Nationalist racio-religio-political organization, as a case study because its subscription to racial ideology enables a liberatory social imaginary, creates a community that mitigates black social death, and generates a valorized black ontology but it also constricts its dreams of the future, preempts non/anti-racial alternatives, and entraps it in the imaginary it opposes. This examination prompts a discussion about whether race, as an ontological and political category, can be rejected prior to the dismantling of white supremacy.*

### Introduction

The central concern animating this article is how white supremacy, through its control of the material, epistemic, and ontological conditions of existence, colonizes the social imaginaries of nonwhite antiracist movements and the implications of this for the movements' ideologies.<sup>1</sup> White supremacy initiated a way of being in the world that required whites to create new ontologies of self and others which they formulated as innate and unequal racial differences, and to 'think' and 'know' racially, that is, to create new epistemologies. The success of

white supremacy resulted in the hegemony of whiteness making it 'constitutive of the epistemology of the West' (Moreton-Robinson 2004, p. 75). White supremacy facilitates the conceptualization and naturalization of ontology as a racial ontology and imposes racial solipsism, the belief that the racial self is the only ontological reality, thereby instituting ontological limits on nonwhite understandings of 'what is' and 'what is possible'. The epistemic violence of white supremacy restricts nonwhite epistemologies to thinking with the racialized Manichean categories of whiteness. Colonization by the racial social imaginaries of whiteness means that if nonwhite antiracist movements want to assert epistemic credibility or authority they are constrained to subscribe to and employ racial ideologies, an act that only furthers their colonization. In addition, because whiteness has been established as the onto-epistemic universal, normal, and natural form and measure of humanness, nonwhites are compelled to develop their ideologies on the template of white racial ideology, even when struggling for emancipation and self-determination. By reworking, rather than rejecting, racial ideologies, they authenticate and enforce racial thinking that complies with the racial and racist logics of whiteness. They get ensnared within the contradiction of liberation/entrapment: between the liberating potential of an antiracist and self-affirming ideology and entrapment within the falsity and limitations of an ideology based on race.

However, advocating for the rejection of race and racial ideology in a white supremacist society is not a transparent and simple proposition and raises issues that need to be considered. The recognition that race is unreal in the biological or cultural sense does not negate that race is real in a sociohistorical and political sense (Mills 1998). Can nonwhite antiracist movements summarily reject the concept of 'race' especially when there are no fully developed alternate identifications and there are critical social questions that cannot be addressed without using it? When nonwhites reject white constructions of their immutable inferiority, then racial identity as an ontological anchoring and a source of individual and community pride is often productive as a positive self and political identification. This questions the assumption that the rejection of 'race' is always unconditionally beneficial. Is non-racialism a viable political and ontological possibility in a racialized and racist society? Is nonwhite antiracist racism necessarily, and at all times, antithetical to struggles against white racism? Writing about the role of Negritude in Africa's liberation from white racist colonization, Chinua Achebe argued that racism might be discarded at a later stage, 'But at the moment we may need to counter racism ... with antiracist racism' (quoted in Molande 2008, p.175). Is it possible to use 'race' without being complicit in whiteness and its racist conceptions of essentialist and naturalized human differences and hierarchies? How do nonwhites efficaciously decolonize from the onto-epistemic colonization of whiteness while living in a white nation that naturalizes and normalizes white rule and in which 'the social ontology of whiteness is a species of racism' (Hage 2000, Yancey 2004)? Or, does white supremacy need to be defeated and 'whiteness cease to possess and express hegemony,

supremacy, and injustice' (Yancey 2004, p. 17) for 'race' and racial ideologies to lose their dominance over nonwhite social imaginaries?

These questions are addressed in the context of historical and contemporary white supremacy in the U.S. A full discussion of white supremacy is beyond the scope of this article but some key points that are germane to this analysis must be highlighted. White supremacy in the U.S. demonstrates Foucault's (1997) argument that in modern states, white racism is 'the basic mechanism of power' that creates a (racial) break in the domain of life between what must 'live and what must die' (p. 255). It is predicated on the belief that the white 'right to take life (is) imperative', promising whites that 'the very fact that you let more die will allow you to live more' (ibid. p. 255). This explains why the first act of white supremacy in the U.S. was the genocide of Native Americans, alongside their conquest, colonization, land theft, displacement and internment, and cultural dissolution. The second act of white supremacy was antiblack slavery and its ongoing afterlife. I examine nonwhite antiracist movements' uses of racial ideology in the second act, that is, in antiblackness. This is done not to make invisible, or be complicit in, white supremacy against Native Americans, but because white supremacist practices of slavery were successful in denying blacks, but not Native Americans, any ontology outside of a racial ontology and reduced, without any mitigation, their personhood to racial personhood. By refusing the black subject any sovereignty, white supremacy was undeterred in de-humanizing blackness, reducing it to 'nothingness', and then reconstituting the black subject as a singularly sub-human racial being. Whiteness became the author of blackness, as a result 'The Negro is in every sense of the word a victim of white civilization' (Fanon 1967, p. 192). Thus, the questions of constraint and freedom in choosing 'race' and racial ideologies for onto-epistemic sense-making are more imperative for blacks than for other nonwhites in the U.S.

During slavery, white supremacy transformed the enslaved into the ultimate tool for the material and psychic benefit of whites by propertizing black bodies and imposing natal and genealogical social death on the enslaved. The slave's human status was alienated, creating the condition of black human nothingness, a condition that is perpetuated post-slavery through racist antiblackness (Gordon 1999). The slave was allowed only a life of externally imposed social negation and ceased to belong in his/her own right. Social death made blacks human non-persons as the terms of their inclusion in the society and to avoid physical death, enslaved blacks had to give up their social personhood, to live and be treated as the 'living who are dead' (Patterson 1982). Slavery made the black subject into 'an object in the midst of other objects' with 'no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man' (Fanon 1967, p. 109). Whites created, for blacks, a zone of non-being, i.e. an existential reality that demands black existence and presence but simultaneously constructs blacks as outside of humanity. 'To see him as black is to see enough. Hence to see him as black is not to see *him* at all. His presence is a form of absence' (Gordon 1999, p. 99). By claiming that whiteness is the

normal and normative mode of humanness, white supremacy negates the existence of black humanness. It continues producing black social death in the on-going afterlife of slavery, a process which Hartman describes as follows: 'Slavery had established a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone. If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black Americans ... it is because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago ... If the ghost of slavery still haunts our present, it is because we are still looking for an exit from the prison' (Hartman 2007, p. 3). White supremacy fuses slave, blackness, social death, and human non-being, into a singular, essentialized and timeless racial identity.

### **Nation of Islam**

I use Nation of Islam, a Black Nationalist, anti-white-supremacy, racio-religio-political organization, as a case study for this discussion because its deliberate constructions of racial ideologies in service of its antiracist struggles demonstrate white supremacy's colonization of nonwhite ontology and epistemology, onto-epistemic resistances to whiteness, and the ensuing condition of liberation/entrapment.<sup>ii</sup> The ideology and practice of NOI is resolutely opposed to white supremacy and white racism and committed to black progress. It rejects white racist epistemologies of blackness and affirms black constructions of 'positive self-identity: one that purges the minds of its members of notions of White superiority and Black inferiority and that addresses the vicious cycle of false identity and self-hatred' (Barnett 2006, p. 874). This is a liberating act that potentially frees blacks from white constructions of black ontology, history and culture. However, the hegemony of epistemological whiteness and the naturalization of racism as the normal mode of social relations, engendered NOI's acceptance of race as real (biological, cultural, divine) and its definition of human nature as essentially racial. By grounding its onto-epistemic ideology in race, racial solipsism, and racial logics, NOI validates, reinforces and is immanent in white supremacy's naturalization and normalization of 'race', racial types and hierarchies of racial differences that legitimize racial supremacy and racial subjugation. The limitations of NOI's onto-epistemic formulations are a consequence of the truth/power effects of whiteness's regime of truth and the continuing power of white supremacy to deploy race as the 'most real social force' as a result of which 'our (black) lives are defined and circumscribed by the brutal reality of racism, a system that denies the humanity of millions of people, limiting their education, employment, health, housing and future' (Marable 1997, p. 2). NOI's ideology is intrinsically tied to the conditions of black urban existence and the specific circumstances of its followers who are mostly poor and working class, incarcerated black men, and the 'fallen' whom it defines as black men and women who 'fell prey' to white produced 'poisons', such as alcohol, drugs, immodest clothing, gambling, prostitution, and criminal behaviors induced by poverty. In effect, NOI speaks to blacks who, in the afterlife of slavery, have been subjected to white supremacy's most horrific racisms manifested in the ongoing

production of black social death, its negation of black human-ness, the denial of any personhood outside of racial personhood, and the relegation of blacks to the zone of non-being where they exist as fungible bodies for the benefit of whites. Thus, it should not be entirely surprising that NOI constructs a racial, and not a non-racial, ideology for those whose lives are overwhelmingly determined by racism. The question posed by NOI's subscription to racial ideology is how a 'radical' black imaginary can be, simultaneously, a source for liberation and an entrapment in the onto-epistemic regime of whiteness.

Nation of Islam's social imaginary is encapsulated in its racial-religio-political narrative that chronicles (1) the origins of the world, Original Man and races and (2) an historical chronology of racial supremacies: original black supremacy, white supremacy, and a racial Armageddon leading to the reclamation of black supremacy. The following is an abbreviated version of the narrative developed by the founder of NOI, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad (Muhammad 1965). According to the narrative, God was displeased by humans and set off an explosion to destroy them and the planet but made sure that his divinely created original humans, Asiatic Blacks, survived. God gave them the most productive, beautiful and sacred place on the earth, the Nile Valley of Egypt and the Holy City of Mecca. American blacks are descendants of that original Asian Black Nation, specifically of the tribe of Shabaaz. 'The original man, Allah has declared, is none other than the black man. The black man is the first and last, maker and owner of the universe. From him come all brown, yellow, red and white people' (Muhammad 1965, p. 53). The Asian Black Nation flourished in peace till the white race was created six thousand years ago, not by God, but by a brilliant but depraved Original Black Man, Yakub.<sup>iii</sup> 'The white race is not, and never will be, the chosen people of Allah (God). They are the chosen people of their father Yakub, the devil' (ibid. p. 134). After being exiled, Yakub made a promise to his followers: 'See how they (the Holy People) have cast you out. Now I will teach you how to go back and rule them all' (ibid. p. 114).

Through his scientific experiments, Yakub discovered that the black man contained two distinct racial genetic structures or 'racial life germs': one, brown and the other, black. He realized that he could clone a new race by splicing the life germs and continuously grafting the brown germ till it reached its last stage—white. To accomplish this, he instituted a birth control law to prevent black reproduction and punished all blacks who violated the law and any black babies that were born by burning them to death in cremators. Through his 'scientific' eugenics program of controlled breeding and grafting Yakub eliminated the black race by changing the race of all newborns every two hundred years, from black to brown to red then yellow and finally, white. Elijah Muhammad concluded: 'The Yakub made devils (devils because they were created to hate and rule blacks) ... [and] were called Caucasian—which means, according to some of the Arab scholars, "One whose evil is not confined to one's self alone, but

affects all others". The whites were created out of lying to and killing blacks. Thus, by nature they are liars and killers' (Ibid. p. 113).

Asiatic Black Muslim armies forcibly deported the immoral and malevolent whites from paradise to the wilderness of Europe and militarized and policed the borders to prevent whites from immigrating back to paradise. In Europe, whites were deprived of divine guidance; they lost civilization, began living like animals in caves and trees, and were naked till they started growing fur-like facial and body hair. Some whites tried to graft themselves back into the black nation but only 'A few were lucky ... and got as far as what you call the gorilla' (ibid. p. 119). The laws of biological, human and social evolution were reversed because whites became a lower life form from which primates and 'swine' evolved. After they had endured two thousand years of savagery, 'Allah raised up Musa (Moses) to bring the white race into civilization: to take their place as rulers, as Yakub intended for them' (ibid. p. 121). God gave whites the 'knowledge and power to bring every living thing into subjection; God said, 'Let them have dominion over ... all of the earth (Gen. 1:26, 28)' (ibid. p. 121). Though whites were created in the likeness of a human being they were, 'by nature different, and thus, by nature, they cannot be the black man's brother' (ibid. p. 122). Whites ruled blacks for the next six thousand years.

As a prophetic millenarian movement, NOI's narrative of origins needed a narrative of the future. Without a prophecy of restored racial glory, sovereignty and power, NOI cannot offer blacks a recovery from the loss of black racial supremacy in the past and white racial subjection in the past and present. Baldwin (2012) has argued that race and racial social imaginaries are constructed in the present, not simply based on the past, but always in relation to the future, an 'imagined time that is yet-to-come ... which can be understood to follow sequentially from a past-present trajectory, or it can be understood as a form of absent presence' (p. 172). For Nation of Islam, racial supremacy is both the original condition and the final destiny of the Black Nation. Thus, liberation/salvation in the future was envisioned as racial Armageddon, when whites, white supremacy, and all manifestations of whiteness, including those internalized by blacks, would be annihilated and black supremacy would be reinstated. On the day of racial reckoning, bombs would destroy the earth and the white race and righteous Asiatic Black Muslims would escape in a space ship/Mother Plane, built by Allah in Japan. The Mother Plane would be a one and a half mile wide, wheel-shaped, space ship carrying fifteen hundred bombing planes filled with the most modern and deadliest bombs. Blacks, God's chosen race, would 'fly to freedom' in the space ship and re-assume their rightful place as the supreme people/race. God would re-bequeath what he had taken from them and given to the white race, that is, dominion over the earth and the knowledge and power to subject all living things to their will and service. The reinstatement of black supremacist global rule would restore the original moral and natural order: 'Now the Great Mahdi (God in person) with His infinite wisdom, knowledge and

understanding, is going to put the Original Black Man in his original place as he was at first, the God and ruler of the universe' (Muhammad 1965, p. 107). Within the frame of supremacist racial ideology, one race's dreams of liberation can become a reality only through its supremacy over the opposing race.

### **Reworking racial onto-epistemologies**

Before proceeding with an analysis of NOI's ideology it is imperative to note that the historical and contemporary practices of white supremacy, including those NOI appropriates, are not practices of NOI and are included in its ideology only as discursive elements. Thus, racial genocide and eugenics were actual white supremacist programs but NOI only narrates them as 'black' acts. NOI's entrapment in the racial epistemology of whiteness is evident in its adoption of an objectivist metaphysics of race, specifically racial realism, and the core truth/power epistemological principles of whiteness, namely: human races are 'natural' and independent of social and historical contingency; races have radically different essences, qualities, origins, histories, and futures; there is an immutable hierarchy, especially at the extremes, of superior and inferior races, even if their 'rightful' places in the hierarchy are temporarily displaced by particular historical contingencies; racial differences are not only morphological, therefore, differences in biology and genetics correspond to differences in culture, intellectual capacities, behavior, and moral proclivities; and racial supremacy is a dispensation, obligation, and undertaking for the superior race. NOI avows that human essence and human-ness is essentially racial, race encompasses all that is human. Like whiteness, NOI ascribes 'race' universalizing explanatory powers.

The Nation of Islam has been condemned by several scholars, including Marable (1998), as reactionary black fundamentalism that 'projected an alternative racial universe, a way of viewing the world through an inverted prism of race' (p. 11). NOI's ideology has been cited as an example of 'an inverted black version of traditional white-supremacist theory' (Mills 1998, p. xiii) and of 'reverse essentialism deployed in the identity politics of minority or marginal groups, including 'race'-based collectivities' that do not disrupt the 'essentialism of racial hierarchies' (Haggis 2005, p. 52). Similarly, Gilroy (2005) contends that racial ideologies have 'often been a defensive gesture, employed by minorities and majorities alike when they wrongly imagine that the hollow certainties of "race" and ethnicity can provide a unique protection' (p. 6). I contend that, even though accurate, it is insufficient to only argue that NOI's ideology is racist and based on reductionist categories of race. Instead, it is more useful to understand its racio-religio-political ideology as a way to make sense of race, of blackness, black history and the black condition, of whiteness and the success of white supremacy. NOI's onto-epistemic continuities and discontinuities with whiteness can be examined as a doublebind of complicity and resistance, that is, its onto-epistemic

resistances partake of the very onto-epistemologies it wants its resistance to invalidate. At the same time, its onto-epistemic resistance, even when articulated in the terms and logics of whiteness does not imply an unqualified acceptance of whiteness. The question I examine is how NOI's subscription to racial ideology enables a liberatory social imaginary, creates a community that mitigates black social death, and generates a valorized black ontology but also constricts its dreams of the future, preempts non/anti-racial alternatives, and entraps it in the imaginary it is opposing.

Nation of Islam produced its onto-epistemic understandings of blackness and whiteness by reinterpreting white instituted epistemological and ontological conditions, that is 'the fundamental meaning generating conditions that frame our ways of being in the world, conditions that make possible who we are and what we might become' (Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos 2004, p. 32). The onto-epistemic conditions for whiteness, for example, racial supremacy, racial hierarchies, and racial violence, were appropriated by NOI as their conditions; thus, NOI asserted that the original ontological condition of racial supremacy was black, not white, supremacy. This claim of a 'new' onto-epistemic condition facilitated NOI's construction of black ontology as essentially superior and powerful and white ontology as immoral and inferior. NOI also used the devaluation and imperilment of black life in the afterlife of slavery as an ontological condition for producing a positive black ontology and history. Lastly, as a result of its resistance/complicity doublebind, it resisted the practices of white supremacy, but also adopted its methods, such as violence, eugenics, and racio-religious theology, to resist white racism and achieve racial supremacy, thereby validating the practices of white supremacy. In what follows, I examine central themes in NOI's ideology that were constructed by the reinterpretation of the onto-epistemic conditions of whiteness and blackness and the reworking of white racial ideologies.

### **Violence and practices of supremacy and liberation**

Every episode of white supremacy comes into existence and is sustained by the exercise of violence against nonwhites. Violence is not an aberrant, unexpected, or extreme practice of white supremacy because its 'regimented, institutionalized, and militarized conceptions of hierarchized 'human' difference' cannot be maintained without constant 'coercions and violences' (Rodriguez 2009, p. 159). White supremacy's constructions of black and native ontologies are themselves acts of violence that are imposed and enforced through terror. White violence is also foundational in creating white community and solidarity, white sanctity, white impunity, and white wellbeing. White supremacy employs spectacular and routine forms of violence, including conquest, genocide, enslavement, everyday degradations of nonwhite subjectivity, body-soul murder, sexual violence, criminalization and incarceration, and labor exploitation. In fact, white supremacy flourishes when its 'violence becomes neutralized and the

shocking readily assimilated to the normal, the everyday, the bearable' and it becomes possible to 'deny the presence of violence by characterizing it within the context of the socially endurable' for nonwhites (Hartman 1997, p. 34). Nonwhites resist white supremacy's violence with violence. Fanon (1963) explains, 'The violence that has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world ... that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into forbidden quarters' (p. 40). NOI is acutely mindful of the productive capacity of violence in the service of resistance and liberation and especially heedful of Fanon's observation that 'for the colonized people this violence ... invests their characters with positive and creative qualities. The practice of violence binds them together' (ibid. p. 93). Recognizing the destructive and productive potentials of violence, NOI's narrative constructs all major events in human history as violent acts, including God's creation of the earth and his Chosen People, the rise of whites and their destruction, the loss of black supremacy, black enslavement, and the regeneration of black global supremacy.

Linked to its valorization of violence is Nation of Islam's fascination with and appreciation of the power of armies and weaponry. NOI mimics white supremacy's glorification of militarized science and technology as methods of destruction and genocide but also redemption and salvation. Its historico-racial narrative was inspired by 'racial' wars fought between superior and inferior races, especially the various race wars of World War II. NOI's imagination was gripped and its racial optimism encouraged by the magnitude of destruction and death, of seemingly entire nations and peoples, during World War II, which were facilitated by applications of new scientific and technological discoveries. The U.S. deployment of newly developed atomic bombs to expand and entrench its white supremacist empire in East Asia, combined with its desire to annihilate the Japanese—whom whiteness had already defined as racially inferior beings (Takaki 1996)—was re-imagined by NOI as atomic bombs that would, in the service of black supremacy, destroy the earth and the white race on the day of racial reckoning. Japan's anti-white-supremacy ideology and war had a significant impact on NOI which was captivated and influenced by Japan's anti-white-supremacist rhetoric and military actions, its expanding imperialism, military prowess, its divinely ordained and absolutist Emperor, and the legendary, almost mythic, iconography of its *samurai* warriors. NOI frequently expressed admiration for Japan's successful bombing of Pearl Harbor, a naval base central to the U.S. war against Japan. Muhammad's son linked black freedom and Japan's war when, during sentencing for resisting the draft, he declared, 'I hope the Japs win the war. Then all the Negroes will be free' (Clegg 1997, p. 82). NOI's eschatology included Allah telling Japan to build NOI's Mother Plane and Malcolm X foretold that Black soldiers would come from the East (Asiatic Black Men) and kill all whites, creating a sea of white blood in the U.S. (Taylor 2005, p. 62). Japan's ideology and actions against white supremacist imperialism had a strong impact on emerging anticolonial

nationalist movements around the world, despite Japan's racist antipathy for the Asian peoples it colonized and its valorization of ethno-national fascism. In fact, I would argue that it was specifically Japan's combination of anti-whiteness and its ethno-racial absolutist state that appealed to NOI because it paralleled NOI's amalgamation of anti-white racism with its admiration of hierarchical, authoritarian, and masculinist forms of polity. The importance of Asia for NOI also attests to the relationships of mutual solidarity and inspiration between Asian anticolonial and black antiracist liberation movements. Mao's 1963 condemnation of antiblack racism in the U.S. exemplified Afro-Asian connections: 'The evil system of colonialism and imperialism arose and thrived with the enslavement of Negroes and the trade in Negroes, and it will surely come to an end with the complete emancipation of the black people' exemplified Afro-Asian connections' (Kelly 2002, p. 66).

### **Racial Sciences: producing naturalized epistemologies**

Racial sciences had a strong hold on Nation of Islam's social imaginary; in fact, it claimed that God and Yakub, the creators of races, were both scientists. Foucault (1972) argues that knowledges do not exist outside of power and 'truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it' (p. 133). White supremacy is the system of power within which racial sciences are produced and legitimized as the 'truth' and racial sciences provide the epistemological reasoning that 'induces and extends' white supremacy's exercises of biopower over nonwhites. Moreton-Robinson (2004) furthers Foucault's theory, arguing that in white supremacist societies 'whiteness is an epistemological *a priori* in the production of knowledge' that results in the racialization of knowing, knowledge, the knower and the known (p. 76). Foucault contends that resistance to the hegemonic powers of 'organized (racial) scientific discourse' and institutions of power can only come from the delegitimized subjugated knowledges produced by silenced and minoritized discursive subjects. In the case of NOI, the problem that arises is that even though it struggles against white supremacy its epistemology of race conforms to white racial sciences; it does not produce an alternative subjugated knowledge of race. NOI does not practice epistemic resistance despite recognizing that white antiblackness and black subjugation are the truth/power effects of white racial epistemologies. Its epistemology remains immanent in what Moreton-Robinson called the *a priori* whiteness of epistemology.

Racial sciences, primarily anthropology and biology, had to invent their objects of study—'race' and racial types—because 'race' does not empirically exist; it is a conceptual fabrication that is treated as an empirical existent. Racial scientists produced 'race' by first, creating an inventory, classification and hierarchy of human differences, then designating those human differences as 'racial differences', and finally assigning those to specific groups, which they subsequently claimed

were distinct and different races. The naturalist epistemology of race claimed that racial differences were permanent, stable and unchanging fusions of biology, culture and psychology and therefore essentialist and historically and socially non-contingent. Further, it asserted that normative and pathological human traits, propensities, and capacity for morality were hereditary biological essences distributed unequally between races. Fields (2001) has argued that disciplinary knowledges created and continue to use 'race' as 'empirical datum and as a tool of analysis' to replace and disguise white racism. Nation of Islam adopted the white racial 'scientific' conclusion of 'race as nature' and its corollary 'race as real'. It did not dispute white epistemology's claims that racial differences (somatic, ontological, and moral) and racial hierarchies are founded on the 'nature of things' and consequently eliminated the possibility of epistemological recognition of racial ambiguity, inconsistency, multiplicity and change.

Despite scientific avowals that racial types were based on natural differences, 'racial difference' is a political marker, a Foucauldian truth/power effect, that defines 'difference' as a quality of nonwhites, allowing whites to be unmarked signifiers of 'normal' and universal humanity. Science and power represent hierarchical racial rankings as mirrors of unequal racial qualities 'found in nature' but the 'differences' and rankings emerge from, and correspond to, white supremacy's institutionalization of material and power inequalities between whites and nonwhites. As da Silva (2011) explains, it is important to 'de-naturalize the concept of race by highlighting that its ethico-political significance does not derive from an intrinsic attribute of 'race' (as a Thing)' but from the 'the positive conditions' in which 'the concept of race and the object it has produced, namely racial difference, have been manufactured to catalogue human conditions' (p.140). The naturalization of different and unequal 'racial types' merged easily into the naturalization of racism and the 'civilizing and moral' subjugation of nonwhites. In his analysis of racial science, Marable (1997) concluded that, 'Stripped of the rhetoric of superiority and inferiority, the science of race is nothing but a fraud, grounded in power, privilege, and violence against those who are oppressed' (p. 2). Though racial sciences were racist sciences, NOI adopted their epistemological premises and logics. By validating the naturalist epistemology of race, and the constructions of racial differences, race types, and moral-cognitive hierarchical rankings of races that it engendered, Nation of Islam imprisoned its members in the disciplinary onto-epistemic possibilities that white supremacy 'permits' blacks in the U.S. NOI did not do what Kelly (2002) said radical black imaginaries must do, i.e., 'enable participants to imagine something different, to realize that things need not always be this way ... to imagine a new society' (p. 9).

### **Eugenics: making races**

Nation of Islam's allegiance to racial science and its juridico-political applications had its strongest manifestation in its adoption of eugenics as a program of racial management. Starting in the early 1900s, the prevalence, institutionalization, and legitimacy of scientific and state juridico-biopolitical eugenic programs in the U.S. were the context for NOI's conceptualization of Yakub's eugenic program. They provided the model, and importantly, accorded plausibility, for NOI's eugenic program. White supremacist eugenic programs were managed and enforced by the state, courts, police/army, scientific and medical institutions, disciplinary knowledges, and philanthropic organizations. The eugenic racisms of the state, both racial purification of whites and racial genocide of nonwhites, were justified in the name of a biological and historical urgency to ensure the superiority of the dominant white race (Foucault 1990). Why should NOI's valorization and appropriation of white eugenic programs not be understood as simply 'reverse essentialism' and 'an inverted black version of traditional white-supremacist theory'? I suggest that, at the least, we should recognize that NOI's re-presence of eugenics as a 'black' program caused a pause or interruption in the normalization of white eugenics. The value and effectiveness of NOI's adoption of racial eugenics can be understood only by contextualizing it in the historical record of white supremacy and its onto-epistemic colonization of social imaginaries.

Nation of Islam adopted not only the fundamental premises of racial sciences but also the scientific/medical and juridico-biopolitical methods of white eugenic programs, including surveillance, reproductive control through forced sterilization and abortion, institutionalization and incarceration, genetic manipulations, the enforcement of anti-miscegenation laws that prohibited and criminalized miscegenation, and racialized anti-immigration policies (Stern 2005, Stubblefield 2007, Wray 2006). However, NOI's goal was unlike that of white eugenic programs that enforced eugenic practices against 'lesser' races and 'lesser' whites, i.e. groups who whites perceived as threats to the purity and supremacy of the white master race.<sup>iv</sup> NOI claimed that Yakub, himself an Original Black Man, used eugenics not to protect the divinely created superior black race but to create an inferior white race that would rule the black race. Yakub's plan to create the white race by 'grafting' and 'breeding' out the black 'essence' or 'life-germ' had significant similarities to Australian eugenic programs that sought to make the 'fantasy of a white nation' a reality through whitening the population by breeding the aboriginal/black out of half-castes (Hage 2000, Warwick 2003).<sup>v</sup> Unlike eugenic programs in other white supremacist nations that prohibited the mixing of 'different racial bloods', the white Australian state advocated the biological absorption of half-castes into the white race by forcing interracial marriages between half-castes and whitened mulattos or whites if the racial 'mix-up' of the couples would produce increasingly whitened offspring (Solenc 2013, p. 77). U.S. white racial ideologies and laws differentiate black and white racial

identity based on the rule that 'one drop' of black blood makes a person black (Gross 2008). Therefore, creating a pure white race/nation and maintaining whites' exclusive access, legal and customary, to rights and privileges, required the strict segregation of black and white blood. Even though it was contrary to its inter-racial 'breeding' eugenic method, NOI also adopted an anti-miscegenation position to maintain the 'purity' of the black race because it believed that inter-racial mixing caused racially unlike and impure white blood to contaminate the black race, thereby jeopardizing the wellbeing not just of the mixed-race family, but of the entire black race. The fear of miscegenation led to both, whiteness's and NOI's, race discourses being saturated with the language of miscegenation: half-breeds and pure breeds, mongrels, race mixing, pure and impure blood, contamination and pollution.

As I discussed earlier, white supremacy against blacks in the U.S. is a history of enslavement, the middle passage, slave auctions, chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and institutionalized racism both *de jure* and *de facto*, all of which perpetrate social death, deny black humanness and ontological sovereignty, terror, and capricious murder. The history and the continuation of antiblackness in the afterlife of slavery is a catalogue of white negation of black autonomy, agency, personhood and life, self-preservation, self-care, and control over the future. I argue that Nation of Islam's racio-religious narrative, and especially the adoption of eugenics, were attempts to gain black control over both, the past, present and future of their own race and over the race that subjugated them: whites. NOI's narrative of the eugenic creation and destruction of races is not simply an inversion of white supremacist ideologies, rather, it defies, albeit discursively, white supremacy and claims control over black destiny. The divine creation of blacks as the first and last humans and the divine instruction that they are the 'makers and owners of the universe' establishes an ultimate and autonomous physical and ontological existence for blacks that white supremacy, through social death or physical genocide, cannot totally negate, even though it can threaten it. It also assures that black supremacy, though temporarily derailed by white supremacy, will triumph. Nation of Islam had to explain how blacks, who it claimed were the superior race, became subjects of white supremacy. This was explained by Yakub's malevolent eugenic creation of the white race and his instruction to them to 'rule the blacks'. Yakub used eugenics to create whites not as equals or superiors of blacks, but as a non-divine, immoral, degenerate and inferior race, who ruled blacks not because of their inherent and 'natural' white superiority but through deception and immoral strategies. Whites were not God's Chosen People nor racial supremacy their divine destiny: rather, Yakub, an Original Black Man created whites and taught them how to subject blacks to white racial supremacy, simply as a childish and corrupt act of personal revenge against the Original Black Men who had shunned him. Thus, black racial subjugation was not caused by an innately and naturally superior white race but by a race invented by a degraded black man. This effectively denies whites agency and power over their own racial

superiority and reduces them to pawns in a black man's hands. Through this narrativization NOI negates black ontological inferiority and 'restores' agency, autonomy and power to blacks living within white supremacy. The NOI's reconstruction of whiteness and blackness allows it to declare that blacks, though presently subordinated, can (re)gain racial supremacy in the future and cause the destruction of the white race.

For blacks 'race mixing' evokes memories of trauma and terror, memories of the systematic raping of enslaved (and free) black women by white men. The ghosts of that social violence continue to haunt black consciousness in the afterlife of slavery (Gordon 2011). That violence frames the ongoing black indictment of black-white inter-racial sexual relations. The raping of black women often resulted in offspring who were racially 'mixed' and therefore constant reminders of both white supremacist sexual violence against black women and white supremacy's negation of black men's power to prevent that violation. NOI's unequivocal condemnation of race mixing and miscegenation cannot be understood outside the historical ghosting of white sexual violence against blacks. This history also explains why NOI constructs Yakub's methods of race-mixing, which resulted in the physical elimination of blacks, as emblematic of absolute evil. Muhammad (1965) used to insist that 'the woman is man's field to produce his nation. If he does not keep the enemy out of his field, he won't produce a good nation' (p. 58) because race-mixing 'not only ruins the races to mongrelize themselves, it just ruins and destroys a people' (Clegg 1997, p. 152). In the U.S., the prevention of nonwhite reproduction has been a standard and ongoing practice of the state. During colonization whites specifically targeted killing native women to prevent the reproduction of the next generation (Smith and Ross 2004) and since that time, and continuing in the present, black and native women's reproduction has been controlled by the white supremacist state through forced sterilization, coerced imposition of lethal contraception devices and drugs, and incentivizing abortions (Ralstin-Lewis 2005, Washington 2006). The NOI strongly condemns and actively resists these white practices of reproductive control, as well as white medical experiments on blacks, as attempts by whites to eliminate the black race (Jones 1993, Washington 2006).<sup>vi</sup>

Fields (2001) argues that there is no parallel between 'the objects and authors of racism' and the 'targets of racism do not 'make' racism, nor are they free to 'negotiate' it' (p. 48). The absence of symmetry between racist whites and blacks does not necessarily preclude the objects of racism from imitating the onto-epistemology of whiteness, as NOI does in its discursive conceptualization of a black eugenic program. The fact that NOI does this to help the black community construct positive and empowered self-identifications to sustain its struggles against continuing white oppression makes this more than 'reverse essentialism'. Resistance, even when it is framed in the dominant epistemology, does not imply an unqualified acceptance of the dominant epistemology, but offers critical interventions through

de-familiarizations, displacements, and unexpected and incongruent replacements.

### **Black Asiatic not Black African**

'The world still remembers (us) Blacks as a race once enslaved and liberated, colonized and freed yet still in need of all kind emancipation [*sic*] ... It is entrenched deep into our cultural psyche that Blacks have always been an inferior or a generally beleaguered race' (Molande 2008, p. 173). Ontologically overdetermined by whiteness, the scope for autonomous black ontology is severely restricted; to be black is to be caught inside the white construction of blackness. Moreton-Robinson (2004) notes that whiteness locates the not-white other in the 'liminal space between the human/animal distinction' and once whiteness is universalized and normalized it defines itself 'by what it is not (animal or liminal), thereby staking an exclusive claim to the truly human. In this way, racial superiority becomes a part of one's ontology' (pp. 77-78). White constructions of blackness as always already immutably inferior emerge from, and are validated by, whites 'seeing' blacks as existing only in the subjugated and 'sub-human' positions imposed by systems of white supremacy, such as colonialism, slavery, and the afterlife of slavery. The white assertion of unchanging black inferiority is strengthened by white epistemological constructions of 'Black American' as 'Black African', that is, irreversibly savage, tribal, violent, enslaveable and enslaved, cognitively, culturally, and psychologically primitive, without history, between human and animal, and 'naturally' criminal. For blacks to construct an ontology outside of its authorship by whiteness 'always involved a renegotiation, a rediscovery of Africa. The African diasporas of the New World have been in one way or another incapable of finding a place in modern history without the symbolic return to Africa' (Hall 1995, p. 9).

Elijah Muhammad was unable, or unwilling, to reclaim or engage with Black Africa as the original or future homeland for blacks in the U.S. He reiterated, and did not oppose or subvert, the white racist constructions of Africa and Africans as uncivilized. This epistemological colonization coupled with his desire to prove that blacks were inherently, 'by nature', superior to whites, made him reject the Black African roots of American Blacks and assert that blacks were descendants of 'Asiatic Blacks'. Muhammad's repudiation of Black Africa was in concert with the views of his predecessors, Noble Drew Ali and W.D. Fard, who located the original home of black Americans in northern Africa and West Asia, Morocco, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Even Marcus Garvey, despite advocating a Back-to-Africa program, believed that blacks were blood brothers not of 'Black Africans' but of 'North Africans, some Indians and even southern Europeans' (Mazucci 2005, p. 13). Garvey envisioned the return to Africa as an antiwhite and anticolonial movement, but he framed it—in terms not totally unlike white colonials and white Christian

missionaries—as a civilizing mission that would convert Africans to Black African Christianity and guide them into modernity.

Muhammad wanted to establish a different geographic-religious-racial site for black identification: a not-white but also not-Black-African site. He chose Mecca, the most holy site for Islam and a site located in Asia, as the original home for blacks, thereby reordering the racial spatialization of civilization. He reconfigured Europe as an undeveloped and barbaric socio-racial-geographic site and the Nile Valley of Egypt and the Holy City of Mecca spatially located in North Africa/West Asia as the original site for civilization. Paradise was located in the Asiatic Black Muslim 'Holy City of Mecca' and not in the white Christian 'Garden of Eden'. NOI's spatial displacement and relocation of civilization and barbarism had significant psycho-affective, cultural, and political resonations with its followers. At the same time, Muhammad's inability to valorize and validate Africa, to break free of the white imaginings of Africa, signified how 'internally one comes to collude with an objectification of oneself which is a profound misrecognition of one's own identity' (Hall 1995, p. 8). Muhammad did establish a non-European centre for blackness but by locating it in Mecca he rejected the decolonizing and antiracist potential of centering it in Black Africa. This was emphasized by Muhammad's inclusion of only the northern Nile Valley region of Egypt and not the southern, Nubian, 'black' region, in the center of civilization. He remained entrapped within the white imperialist construction of Egypt as 'white', separate from and unlike Black Africa. By not recognizing Egypt as Black African, Muhammad could not attribute the Egyptian origin of human civilization to blackness.

American Blacks' knowledge that their ancestors were enslaved West African blacks and not Asiatics was not easily falsified or dislodged—a fact that forced Muhammad to make changes in NOI's historical narrative. The revised narrative claimed that between the divine creation of the Original Asiatic Blacks and Yakub's genetic production of whites, a scientist named Shabazz took his family and went down into the 'jungles of Africa'. Muhammad described that family in the following terms: 'our people were soft; they were black but they were soft and delicate, fine. They had straight hair. Right here on this Earth you find some of them look like that today. They are black as night, but their hair is like silk, and originally all our people had that kind of hair' (quoted in Austin 2003, p. 57). However, living in the African jungle altered their physical appearance 'our hair became stiff, like it is now' and 'we undertook new features that we have now'. In establishing this narrative, Muhammad became caught in what Moreton-Robinson (2004) theorizes as whiteness's regime of power that controls which representations are of value, truthful, fictitious, contested or accepted, normalized, and become common knowledge. Muhammad did not contest the white monopoly of representations of beauty and desire and he identified Africa as the anthropomorphist agent that transfigured Asiatic Black beauty into black/African 'ugliness'. Consequently, he reinforced both white aesthetic supremacy and what Morrison (1993) describes as the disabling

consequences of white representations of black looks as personifications of immutable ugliness, namely, racial self-loathing, psychological murder, and the damaging internalization and acceptance of rejection as legitimate and self-evident. In the 1960s, the Black Power movement rejected white supremacy's power to construct and evaluate representations of blackness and reclaimed black racial beauty by defining 'black African' as beautiful. Elijah Muhammad's response to the 'Black is Beautiful' movement was a reiteration of his internalized white representations of Black Africans as ugly and Africa as the site where the Original Black Asiatic beauty and civilization had declined, 'Black Brother and Black Sister, wearing savage dress and hair-styles ... I have been preaching that we should accept our own; and instead of the Black man going to the decent side of his own, he goes back seeking traditional Africa, and the way they did in jungle life and the way you see in some parts of uncivilized Africa today' (quoted in Mazucci 2005, p. 75).

Though seeking to liberate blacks from the hold of white supremacy, NOI's reimagining of black ontology as decidedly not African Black kept it entrapped in white racist epistemologies of blackness. Malcolm X realized the causes and consequences of this internalized racial self-loathing only after he broke with Nation of Islam: 'Having complete control over Africa, the colonial powers of Europe projected the image of Africa negatively' as 'jungle savages, cannibals, nothing civilized' (Malcolm X 1970, p. 73-74). He went on to explain that white dehumanizing and degrading representations of Africans became 'negative to you and me, and you and I began to hate it. In hating Africa and in hating the Africans ... our African characteristics ... in hating our features and our skin and our blood we ended up hating ourselves ... what made us feel helpless was our hatred for ourselves. And our hatred for ourselves stemmed from our hatred for things African' (p. 74).

### **Religion and race making**

In the U.S. religion plays a significant role in 'race making' and it is more than a justification or legitimization for racialized acts, though it is that too. In fact, religion constitutes racial identities and race is the lens through which religion is experienced. Weisenfeld (2009) explains, 'The American nation, then, has functioned not only as a theological concept through which a particular destiny has been articulated, but also as a profoundly racialized one in which American destiny is inextricably linked to a white national identity' (p. 32). Christianity, specifically Protestant Christianity, in the U.S. has been at the centre of 'the manufacturing, packaging, and distribution of whiteness' (Blum 2009, p. 4). From the nation's inception in colonialism and slavery, white Biblical and theological interpretations shaped white constructions of the racial identities of Native Americans, blacks, and whites. I am not arguing that Christianity is innately, transhistorically, and non-contingently white and/or racist but that it has 'been thought and felt in distinctly white ways for most of its

history, for instance ... the ready appeal to the God of Christianity in the prosecution of doctrines of racial superiority and imperialism' (Dyer 1997, p.17). In the U.S. whites have practiced racism as Christians and Christianity has provided whites justification that as God's Chosen People their domination is divinely ordained. Hence, 'from the eighteenth century to the present, ideas about race ... often involved conceptions of the cosmic, the demonic, and the divine. Ideas of racial difference were often attempts to see the work of God in this world' (Blum 2009, p. 5). Racism becomes justifiable because it was grounded in the religious epistemology of divine intention. Fessenden (2009) argues that both whiteness and Christianity not only work with one another but work in the same way as unmarked categories in the U.S. whose normalization and naturalization enables their claims of universalism and of white Christians as the definition and measure of humanity.

Despite the mutually useful and reinforcing bonds between white supremacy and Protestant Christianity, the use of Christianity as a racio-religio theology was not restricted to whites. Blacks opposed to white supremacy—including abolitionists, Black Nationalists and Civil Rights politico-religious leaders—cast Christianity as a black religion. Black theology 'corrected' white Christian theologies that only sanctified whites and it reinterpreted black existence and black ontology as equally divinely ordained, blessed and moral. Often, black religious leaders in antiracist struggles would characterize blacks as more moral and spiritual 'true Christians' than whites. There were always variations in black politico-religious interpretations of Christianity: for example, Marcus Garvey twinned the critique of whiteness with advocacy of black nationalism by claiming an Ethiopian origin for Christianity, thereby Africanizing Christianity and urging black Christians to separate from the white supremacist nation and go back to Africa, the motherland for both blacks and Christians.

Nation of Islam's response to the racio-religious supremacy of co-constituted Christianity and whiteness was to reject Christianity, which it defined as innately white and synonymous with the oppression of nonwhites, and especially blacks, and to claim Islam as the only 'one true religion'. For NOI, Islam was a more ontologically productive religion because Islam's history provided the bases for a pro-black, anti-white supremacist and anti-American identification. Islam was 'known' to be historically opposed to white Christians: it signified resistance and armed struggle: Muslim Moors had colonized Europe, and enslaved Muslims from Africa had a reputation for being in the vanguard of slave resistance in the U.S. NOI thought of Islam as the 'natural' religion of the oppressed because it was 'independent of white people (or at least Europeans), the latter having no authority to define its ethos or its substance' (Hartnell 2008, p. 210). I claim that NOI adopted Islam to provide its followers with a religion and an anchor in a faith community, both of which have historically been vital for black solidarity and to establish a strong social/racial community that had common 'secular' understandings, goals and struggles, and that provided shelter and safety in a white supremacist nation.

Nation of Islam's allegiance to Islam was also effective in its resistance to Black Christianity, which it condemned as subservient to white Christianity, even when Black Christianity advocated antiracism. NOI rejected Black Christianity's dominant historical narrative of racial conditions in the U.S. which commended the Bible and 'secular' white-authored national founding documents—such as the Declaration of Independence, Emancipation Proclamation and the Constitution—for enshrining principles of equality and human rights (past promise), described how the U.S. failed in realizing those principles because of its racist practices (current failure), and promised that eventually whites would realize the immorality of racism and the ethical-political principles of racial equality would become a reality (eventual fulfillment). NOI broke with this 'history' by refusing any legitimacy to the notion that the founding documents or the Bible were articulations of racial equality; instead it defined them as articulations of the innately racist ethical-political principles of white supremacy (Miller 2004). It declared that black theologians/Civil Rights leaders had projected onto white Americans views that whites never had, that black theologians had created 'a new, alien (for U.S.) tenet of equality and mislabeled it a white tradition' (Miller 2004, p. 210). NOI also discredited the black Christian theologian use of the 'Exodus' trope of slaves being led to freedom in the Promised Land (imagined by black Christians as a non-racist U.S.) and replaced it with 'Egypt' because Egypt signified 'an alternative site of identification, not with Hebrew slaves but rather with a more glamorous vision of civilization residing in the Nile valley—one that we might more readily associate with Pharaoh, the master of slaves' (Hartnell 2008, p. 212). However, NOI's 'Islam' was different from the Islam that originated in West Asia and the Islam brought to the U.S. by enslaved Africans. NOI configured its version of Islam to address the specific conditions of its followers who were the most dispossessed and oppressed of the black community, and subject to the severest forms of ontological antiblackness. In fact, NOI's work with incarcerated black men led to Islam becoming the strongest force of black resistance in U.S. prisons. NOI's version of a black focused Islam was consistent with its goals of racial uplift through self-knowledge, love of self and race, and service to the black community.

Nation of Islam's religious theology was as committed to race-making as white Christianity; race remained the lens through which religion was experienced and religion was the source of racial legitimacy. NOI constructed its racio-religious theology by using many sources including versions of racio-religious Christianity, some elements from white supremacist racio-religious ideologies such as Christian Identity, secular racial ideologies of white supremacy and ideologies of black resistance, including Black Nationalism. Though it espoused Islam as an oppositional practice against Christianity the generational and everyday immersion of NOI's members and leaders, including Elijah Muhammad, in black and white forms of Christianity made it inevitable that Christianity was a dominant source of its racio-religious theology. In fact, NOI used the Bible more than the Qur-an to legitimate its historical racio-religious narrative claims, despite claiming that it was a

'poison book' that included 'slavery teachings' such as 'love your enemies' and 'turn the other cheek'. Elijah Muhammad insisted that 'We are the writers of the Bible and the Qur-an' (Berg 1989, p. 327, Curtis E 2005).<sup>vii</sup> The freedom Islam offered NOI from imprisonment in white racio-religious theology was not fully realized. 'Race' as a social category, ontology or epistemology does not exist in Islam's religious theology and it was NOI's overriding commitment to race that entrapped it within the racio-religious logics of white Christianity. The name of Allah and the Qur-an were invoked, but Islam was not NOI's dominant religious epistemology—largely because Islam did not include or lend itself to a racial ontology and ideology.

### **Race and liberation**

The preceding discussion demonstrates that the Nation of Islam racio-religio-political response to whiteness is complex and contradictory. It successfully negates white racist ontologies and epistemologies of blackness and constructs an affirming black ontology but also complies with the racial logics of whiteness that ultimately limit its imaginary. NOI conceptualizes blackness in the ontological conditions of white supremacy or, perhaps more accurately, in what Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos (2004) call the 'ontological disturbance' that white supremacy is for blackness. White supremacy is always a disturbed ontological condition for blackness, a condition that denies the possibilities of a coherent, self-determined, life-affirming and empowering, black ontology. NOI is unable to fully liberate itself from the onto-epistemic hegemony of whiteness and it constructs blackness within the racial logics of whiteness, consequently it accepts and validates whiteness' naturalization, normalization, and universalization of 'race'. However, this is not a 'choice' it makes freely because white supremacy's enforcement of the onto-epistemic logics of whiteness make it virtually impossible for black ontology not to be based in race.

NOI's racio-religio-political narrative and, I would argue, the very 'unrealness' and implausibility of some parts of it, interrupts, and for a moment may even disrupt, the normalization and naturalization of the racial logics of whiteness. But, momentary disruption does not lead to NOI's rejection of 'race' and racial logics; rather, its subscription to racial ideologies leads, quite seamlessly, into beliefs in innate, immutable and 'natural' racial differences, hierarchies of superior and inferior races, and racial supremacy and subjection. This authenticates and enforces, instead of dislodging, the racial/racist thinking constitutive of whiteness, an epistemology that is always in service of white supremacy. Is it necessary to eliminate race from the politics of anti-white supremacy or can race be used as a site for resistance? Ware and Back (2002) contend that political projects against white supremacy must be 'an attack on the very notion of race and the obstinate resilience of racial identities', and especially the ontological fusion of the categories of human and race (p. 2). They join Gilroy (2005) in arguing for a politics of nonracial universal

humanism that requires not a 'deeper engagement with 'race' or racial conflict—understood as natural phenomena, immune to the effects of historical or political process—but away from 'race' altogether and toward a confrontation with the enduring power of racisms' (p. 9). In contradistinction, Cowlshaw (2005) points out that the rejection of race, rather than being a pre-requisite for nonwhite anti-racist struggles, actually benefits whites because, 'without race, racial inequality becomes invisible and racism is not defeated' and hence the refusal of race as a category actually protects whites, their power and privileges (p. 60). Nonwhite racial identities formed in opposition to white supremacy are mostly positive rather than regressive, and become powerful sources for resistance to white racism.

Race, as an ontological and political category, cannot be rejected by blacks living within, and subject to the devastating consequences of, the ongoing afterlife of slavery. In the absence of alternative ontologies, identities, and vocabularies for race, nonracialism is inadequate for constructing an ontology and epistemology for blackness and as a force for resistance against white supremacy. It is not viable for blacks, and other nonwhites, to discard the category of race before dismantling the apparatus of white supremacy because it continues to make race/racism productive for whites. In fact, it is the very real social force of white supremacy and its racisms that legitimizes, validates and popularizes NOI's racial ideology. NOI's maxim that 'the white man is the devil' seems entirely believable only because of white antiblack racisms in the ongoing afterlife of slavery. Without white supremacy NOI's racial ideology would have no purchase but an imaginary NOI conversion to nonracialism would have no impact on white supremacy and its racisms.

If we accept the political and ontological efficacy of race, especially for resistance, then NOI's racio-religio-political ideology raises the question of whether subscription to race necessarily, and always, implies or engenders complicity with beliefs of racial supremacy and racial subjection. Whiteness and NOI's ideology would answer that question affirmatively. Without epistemologies of naturalized and valorized white racial superiority and supremacy, whiteness would not be of service to the structures and workings of white supremacy. The onto-epistemic colonization of NOI's imaginary by white supremacy results in NOI believing that it has a similar need for, and reliance on, the Manichean categories of racial ideologies where freedom and human-ness of one racial group depends on the un-freedom and lack of humanity of the opposite group. Mills (1998) proposes that we re-think 'race' as both real and unreal: 'race can be ontological without being biological, metaphysical without being physical, existential without being essential, shaping one's being without being in one's shape' (p. xiv). The Nation of Islam, however, is unable to think of race as unreal, even in a strategic way, because it remains entrapped within the racial logics of whiteness even in its struggles against white supremacy.

**Sadhana Bery is an Assistant Professor in Sociology at University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, U.S. Her current research is on spaces of white supremacy, ranging from studies of the global white diaspora to local reenactments of slavery by whites. Email: sbery@umassd.edu**

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### Notes

<sup>i</sup> A brief clarification of terms: white supremacy refers to the systemic structures of racialized white rule over non-whites; whiteness signifies onto-epistemic ideologies based on the reification of 'race' as an index of human difference and worth; and white practices are the spectacular and routine actions that exercise and re/produce white supremacy

<sup>ii</sup> Hereafter, Nation of Islam will be referred to as NOI. This article does not enter into the debates that have been dominant in the scholarship on NOI: (1) whether NOI is a religious group, a political group, or a protest social movement (2) whether NOI believes in and practices 'real' Islam. These are important debates but not central to the focus of this article.

<sup>iii</sup> I use NOI's patriarchal terminology to highlight its patriarchal and masculinist ideology. NOI's use of 'Original Black Man' disappears and negates black women, by making 'Black Man' denote all blacks and by designating 'Black Man' as the sole and primary agent of blacks.

<sup>iv</sup> 'Lesser' whites were whites classified, by other whites, as criminal, degenerate, sub-human, poor, and cognitively disabled and therefore threats to the superior and normative whiteness.

<sup>v</sup> I am not claiming that NOI knew about or was referencing Australian eugenics programs. I am noting the similarities and differences of the racial logics underlying all eugenic programs.

<sup>vi</sup> It is important to note that white control of nonwhite reproduction did not always mean the prevention of reproduction. After the end of the slave trade, when whites needed to maintain the supply of black slaves, they forced enslaved black women to reproduce, often by white slave masters, overseers, and other white men, raping them. See, Davis A (1981).

<sup>vii</sup> I am using Nation of Islam's spelling of the Qur-an.

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