

**"WE ARE PROTECTING OUR WOMEN":
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF BLACK AMERICAN RACIAL SALVATION, GENDER, AND
SEXUALITY IN THE NATION OF ISLAM, 1970-1980**

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Abstract

Black history and studies revealed that Black people in the United States had experienced slavery, racism, classism, and socio-religious exclusion. In double, Black women experienced these as a Black woman and Black person, as this represents a gender dimension of Black struggles. Black experiences and struggles led to the emergence of many Black new religious movements, such as the Nation of Islam (NOI). As a way of helping and protecting Black women from double discrimination, the Nation of Islam advanced rules and regulations. Having these rules and regulations, there were complaints that the Nation of Islam limited women's gender freedom. This paper examined the question: How does the Nation of Islam affect women's gender and sexual freedom? This study explored the intersection of gender, sexuality, race, liberation, and New Religious Movements in Black communities in the United States. The research examined how race, racism, and the struggle for Black liberation affected gender and sexuality in the Nation of Islam between 1970 and 1980. The paper argued that Black experiences and struggles and Black liberation through faith determined the theology guiding gender and sexuality rules and conduct in the Nations of Islam. As a religious, feminist and gender historiography, this secondary source and qualitative paper contribute to the study of critical race, intersectionality, New Religious Movements, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Africana Studies, and History by reviewing relevant literature.

Keywords: Gender, Sexuality, Women, Salvation, Nation of Islam

Introduction

Studies have often focused on themes and history of the Nation of Islam (NOI) through the actions and voices of its male leaders, resulting in a paucity of studies on women in NOI. Weisenfeld (2017), Curtis (2006, 2018), White (2001), Taylor (2017), Rashid (2013), Walker (2005), Gibson (2014), and Chan-Malik (2018) discussed the struggle for Black racial upliftment or salvation as a factor that resulted to the gender-sexuality constraints and Black women's empowerment in Nation of Islam in the 20th Century. These scholars presented racial salvation and women's role and place in NOI as complex and dynamic discourses due to women's different reactions to empowerment and restrictions and the varying perspectives of scholars. Studies have shown that outsiders expressed the experiences and roles of women in the NOI as being constrained, while insiders viewed their experiences as a choice and price to be paid for Black racial salvation. However, these constraints, choice, and price in women's gender and sexuality roles

had yet to be considerably discussed in connection to Islam since NOI has adopted some theological aspects of Islam. This paper, hence, asserts that the gender and sexuality constraints were a function of both racial salvation and partially, Islamic theological realities in the treatment of women. Hence, this paper examined the historiography of the interrelations between racial salvation and gender and sexuality in NOI from 1970 to 1980.

This paper explored various arguments, strengths, weaknesses, and methodologies to reveal the complexities and research gaps in NOI scholarship. This paper argued that the interplays of racial salvation and gender-sexuality in NOI were dynamic, and they were in between Black empowerment and the constraint of women's gender and sexuality roles, which existed not only because of racial upliftment but also because of the gender and sexuality constraints visible in Islam, the source religion for NOI. This study explored how the Nation of Islam treats women in the face of attempts at or struggles to achieve racial uplift for Black communities. This paper interrogated how secondary sources approach questions such as: What is the role and place of women in the Nation of Islam? What was the attitude of men towards women? Were women free to determine their marital, reproductive, and sexual freedom? What are the views of scholars on racial upliftment and gender and sexuality in the Nation of Islam? How do men protect women in the Nation of Islam? How does this protection solve gender discrimination against Black women? And what is the source of gender and sexuality constraints in NOI? This study also considered the works of scholars that have written on Islam and NOI, but not on gender, to understand the source of the gender and sexuality constraints in the NOI.

Conceptual Clarification

The following terms are clarified thus:

1. **Historiography:** As a historiography paper, this study examined the work historians have done on how the Nation of Islam responds to the racial salvation of Black American women in relation to gender and sexuality. Adopting Tosh's (2015) work, the term historiography applies to this paper, as it is a review of an individual scholar's work and interpretations on race, gender, and sexuality in the NOI. This paper positions historiography as the study of how history on race, gender, and sexuality is discussed, the sources, and the methods employed in constructing history, and the strengths, relevance, and gaps in the work
2. **Racial Salvation:** Racial salvation could also mean racial uplift. It is the idea that the dignity, liberation, freedom, and well-being of Black communities depend on a collective effort that can be achieved and sustained through education, leadership, politics, religion, economic development, and social reforms (Gaines, 1996). Racial salvation, in the context of the African American experience of White Supremacy, injustice, and systematic oppression, involves beliefs and struggles for Black empowerment, liberation, and restoration of Black racial dignity and pride. The term is used because NOI believes Black communities will be liberated through religious, economic, scientific, technological, and social independence.
3. **Gender constraints:** This term is used to represent the barriers that restrict NOI's women in decision-making and participation in society on account of racial salvation that calls for the social construction of gender roles and expectations.
4. **Respectability:** Respectability is a term that emerged as a response to the marginalization of Black American communities and the need for Black people to be respected by engaging and getting committed to Sexual restraint and propriety, modest dress and public conduct, marriage and stable family structures, religious devotion, educational achievement, and economic self-sufficiency. Engaging in these practices will

lead to social acceptance, the attainment of rights, and racial salvation.

5. Empowerment: It is the process (gender and sexuality constraints) through which NOI provides to enhance women's capacity, agency, and access to respectability and liberation.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative historiographical research design, grounded in the analysis of secondary sources, to examine scholarly interpretations of racial salvation, gender, and sexuality within the Nation of Islam (NOI) between 1970 and 1980. This paper does not reconstruct history through archival sources but rather examines how historians, religious studies scholars, Africana scholars, and gender scholars have discussed and interpreted the nexus between Black racial salvation and women's experience in the NOI. This study reviewed literature from peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and books published by reputable university presses and renowned scholars of gender studies, the Nation of Islam, Africana Studies, and religious studies.

The literature and scholars were selected based on their engagement with the NOI, their discourse on Black American women, race, and racial salvation within the NOI context, the significance of their NOI discourse, and their contributions to that discourse. Based on individual scholars' presentation of diverse methodological traditions and interpretations of the intersectionality of race, gender, and liberation in the NOI, the works of foundational scholars like Edward E. Curtis IV, Ula Yvette Taylor, Judith Weisenfeld, Vibert White Jr., Samory Rashid, Dawn-Marie Gibson, and Sylvia Chan-Malik were selected for this study. The selected scholarships were analyzed individually to examine their positions, methodologies, sources, arguments, strengths, and gaps in their accounts of the NOI. Also, the selected literature was examined comparatively to identify areas of convergence and how they are in conversation with one another. The various discussions in this paper are grounded in an intersectional analytical framework. An intersectional analytical framework, in the context of this study, examines race, gender, sexuality, religion, and liberation as mutually interconnected in the Black American struggle for liberation. This paper, through historiographical inquiry and an intersectional analysis of the selected literature, provides a synthesis of how racial salvation impacts women in the NOI.

Periodization of Nation of Islam

It is significant to begin this historiography paper with the historical periodization of the Nation of Islam to reveal the socio-religious and cultural fluidity in the beliefs and practices of the movement, how this explains the various perspectives scholars expressed on the interplays between racial upliftment or salvation and gender-sexuality manifestation in the movement, and why this work concentrates on 1970-1980. In Detroit, Michigan, the Nation of Islam emerged in 1930 as a response to the economic inequality, racial segregation, and violence against Black people during the Jim Crow period in the United States (Curtis, 2006; Lincoln, 1994). The founder, Wallace Fard Muhammad (also known as W. D. Fard), established the movement on some principles adopted from Islam and Black nationalism. The foundational theology of the NOI positions African Americans as the original people of the world, and Islam was their true religion, but they lost both during slavery (Curtis, 2006). His teaching gave Black people a sense of divine identity. In 1934, Fard suddenly disappeared, and Elijah Muhammad emerged as the movement's leader.

This study divides the history of the Nation of Islam into distinct periods, including 1930–1934, which marks its establishment and early development under the leadership of Wallace Fard Muhammad in Detroit,

Michigan. During this period, Wallace established the Nation of Islam based on Islamic religious teachings, Black nationalism and empowerment, and Black economic independence (Curtis, 2006). The second period was from 1934 to 1975, during which Elijah Muhammad served as the leader of the Nation of Islam following Wallace's sudden disappearance (Walker, 2005). The movement's expansion marked this period: the establishment of schools and economic institutions for Black independence, the organization of the movement into structures, the recognition of Wallace as a prophet, and the emergence of Malcolm X within the movement.

The third period, between 1975 and 1978, under Warith Deen Mohammad's leadership, was reformative because the NOI converted to and aligned with Sunni Islam (Walker, 2005). However, division among members marred this period. The last division, which lasted from 1978 to the present, is led by Louis Farrakhan. He leads the movement from the headquarters at Mosque Maryam in Chicago, Illinois, and follows some of Elijah Muhammad's leadership patterns. He focused on racial dignity, economic empowerment, and activism, including the 1995 "Million Man March" and his involvement in Black Lives Matter (Walker, 2005). This paper further grouped the overall historical periodization into three academic classifications: (i) The 1930s-1960s was characterized by constraints gender and sexuality due to the determination for racial salvation of African American communities; (ii) The 1970s-1980s show questions on the manifestations of the role of women, and; (iii) The 1990s are loaded with discourses on intersectionality, heteronormativity, queerness, and patriarchal accounts in the movement. Therefore, 1970-1980 was a transformative period in gender and sexuality roles and beliefs in NOI. The emergence of feminist thought during this period challenged NOI's theology.

Historiography of Racial Salvation, Gender, and Sexuality in the Nation of Islam

Curtis (2006) approached the study of the Nation of Islam from a multidisciplinary perspective, drawing on religious, sociological, and historical approaches that emerged from the analysis of primary data and oral history. His work addresses different aspects of life within NOI. The book examines "how members of NOI imagined, performed, and practiced Islamic religion during the 1960s and 1970s" (Curtis, 2006, p.6). He argued that NOI is an Islamic movement, a site for sacred and profane (other natural human activities) activities (Curtis, 2006). This book presents testimonies from women in the NOI to discuss the interplay between race, gender, and sexuality. The testimonies from women positioned NOI's approach to racial salvation and gender-sexuality as a history of empowerment and constraint for women. For instance, regarding empowerment, he discussed the testimony of Sister Marilyn A. X. of Springfield, Massachusetts. She testified to moral empowerment and transformation from being "immoral to a respectable woman. She said:

Before I became a follower of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, my life was nothing. All the vices the white man had, I had. I would swear, smoke, drink, fornicate, and do everything unclean and indecent. Many times, I had wanted to lead a clean and decent life, but I had nothing I could cling to... They invited me to come to one of their meetings. The next Sunday I went... The minister who spoke that night said, "the reason the black woman in America is leading a life of indecency and low morals is because this is the way the slave masters taught her." He said those who follow the Honorable Elijah Muhammad become

upright respectable women." This is what I was seeking ... Allah has blessed me and I have become a clean, respectable, decent upright woman ... (Curtis, 2006, p. 28).

She tied her testimony to respectability, race, and women's active participation in NOI and in the role of "Queens of civilization." Curtis did not explain the term "Queen of civilization," but it points to Black women's empowerment in Black communities and in America. Within the NOI, leaders and doctrinal teachings placed women as key to the survival and destiny of the Black race, framing the female body as the "field of the nation" and women's wombs as essential to Black racial salvation. (Curtis, 2006, p. 123). The NOI, as inferred from the writing of Curtis, does not support abortion. Abortion is called "death for my babies and race" (Curtis, 2006, p. 123). Also, the teaching of the NOI declared homosexual relations to be a mental disorder. The NOI affirmed that no one was ever born homosexual, but people learn it in their environment. Women were expected to dress modestly and not use makeup or cosmetics (Curtis, 2006). Sexual relations are permitted only in marriage, and marriage must be monogamous (but Elijah Muhammad was involved in an extramarital affair, which stains the NOI's teaching on morality and sexuality). Also, the NOI teaches that sex is a tool for pleasure and spiritual growth (Curtis, 2006). Therefore, in the NOI, racial salvation is a function of reproduction that places reproductive expectations on women. It was an expectation, and women were not put under compulsion to procreate because having babies requires proper planning. Women were discouraged from using childbearing control pills, but they could use natural medicine to avoid the perceived side effects of some pills.

His argument locates gender roles and sexual norms in the Islamic religion and the legal tradition of *Shariah*. (Hallaq (2009) explained that *Sharī'ah* could be defined as the moral, legal, and ethical way one must follow as a Muslim. *Shari'ah* law shows the lawful and unlawful things in every aspect of Islam. It has its source in the Qur'an (Muslim's Holy and Glorious scripture), Hadith of the Prophet, Islamic analogical reasonings, and everything Islamic scholars agreed on). Women, as homemakers, mothers, and moral leaders, served as the Black community's moral backbone, charged with preserving the dignity and purity of African American communities. The leaders of NOI position men as heads of homes and communities, and as leaders of NOI. The patriarchal structure within Islam is also reflected in the NOI, as women experience some ideologies that restrict their self-determination and the use of their bodies. However, many women in NOI saw the constraint as liberation and empowerment. During this period, the NOI teachings held that women were made for the home and for domestic roles (Curtis, 2006). Curtis illustrated how women, such as the wife of Elijah Muhammad, Sister Clara Muhammad, played leadership roles by assisting their husbands. Also, the book narrates cases of women who used their organizational and educational skills and positions to demand gender equality for women in NOI and America.

Curtis's arguments are balanced and insightful. The various accounts and testimonies from women in the NOI are helpful for his descriptive approach to telling the story of the NOI and its women, and for retaining the original voices of the individuals to show moral empowerment, respectability, and racial salvation. The descriptive approach enables him to offer readers the opportunity to identify the areas of gender-sexual equality and gender-sexual constraints. This excellent account of the NOI offers multiple perspectives from women who were insiders in the NOI, demonstrating that this work is relevant to religious history, History, Africana Studies, and Islamic Studies. Curtis discussed the NOI as a New Religious Movement within Islam.

He asserted that the Islamic religion hinges on three concepts: man, society, and God, which reveals the reason for gender-sexuality restrictions in NOI (Curtis, 2006).

However, since Curtis argued that NOI is an Islamic movement established on Islamic doctrines and Black Nationalism, he should have commented on some fundamental differences that exist between Islam in the mainstream and Islam in the NOI as a New Religious Movement. For instance, Islam welcomes polygamy (polygyny), and Prophet Muhammad (May Peace be unto him), the reformer and last Prophet in Islam, married eleven wives for the reasons of strengthening community cooperation, collaboration among tribals, and as a way of helping widows whose husbands died and need help. Also, the Glorious Qur'an states that:

If you fear you cannot be equitable to orphan girls (in your charge, or misuse their persons), then marry women who are lawful for you, two, three, or four; but if you fear you cannot treat so many with equity, marry only one, or a maid or captive. This is better than being iniquitous (Qur'an 4:3). Howsoever, you may try, you will never be able to treat your wives equally. But do not incline (to one) exclusively and leave (the other) suspended (as it were). Yet if you do the right thing and are just, God is verily forgiving and kind (Qur'an 4: 129).

From the above quote, NOI adhered to the reality of this passage of the Qur'an, and preaching monogamy suggests some level of gender equality, which Edward's work lacks the Islamic theological insight to address. Curtis certainly needs to cite some Qur'anic verses to justify that NOI is an Islamic new religious movement, because the scripture of every religion is its fundamental source of data. Lastly, Edward's work should employ feminist theories and ideas to justify the need to study women's roles in NOI. His work, as well as Taylor's book, *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam*, which centers on the mid-20th Century, shows the complexity of gender-sexuality manifestations in NOI.

Taylor stated that the experiences of Muslims and African Americans align and justify the use of Islamic theology in the NOI. In addition to Islamic theology, NOI was established as a "home-grown religion" with beliefs and practices related to "Ahmadiyyah, the Moorish Science Temple, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association" (Taylor, 2017, p. 2). The leadership of the movement stands to break White supremacy and oppression by labeling them as devils and uncivilized and creating an alternative and befitting religion for Black people (Taylor, 2017). With this background, she examines the lives of female members of NOI from 1930 to 1975, a period loaded with historical events such as the "Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, the modern civil rights and Black Power movements, and the feminist movement," and how these events led women to choose NOI (Taylor, 2017, p.5).

Taylor (2017) described the Nation of Islam as a movement that cherishes racial progress for Black people and is passionate about bearing their burden, as reflected in the stories of hardworking, uneducated women who joined the Nation of Islam. She argued that Black women who were members of the Nation of Islam faced the choice between living for self-pleasure and living for family, and that the Nation of Islam served to ensure the salvation of the Black community (Taylor, 2017). The NOI was the vehicle for racial salvation, and men were the chief drivers of the vehicle. The discourse on choosing NOI is significant because, for women, especially, it involves accepting being remade through the religious precepts of NOI, which results in experiencing some restrictions to get liberated from White domination and oppression. She explained that the Nation of Islam has a responsible promise of patriarchy for a healthy nuclear family, where

divorce is permitted on reasonable grounds (Taylor, 2017). Therefore, Black women who have been abused, discriminated against, and disrespected got a place of honor in the Nation of Islam but with the "conscious choice" of investing in patriarchy to be "remade for the larger good of the black race" (Taylor, 2017, p.6). The members of NOI have the conscious choice to choose between obeying the gender and sexual norms, and religious and moral obligations of the movement, or cease to be members of the Nation.

She provided a critical history of women in NOI by focusing on their experiences and their relationship to NOI's patriarchal structure. In terms of empowerment, many Black women testified to finding self-reliance, racial pride, economic independence, and religious freedom in the NOI (Taylor, 2017). Women were happy to find an alternative religion to replace Christianity, which was viewed as a White man's religion and a site where equality and liberation were promised against oppression and inequality. Taylor (2017) also argued that the principles of family unity, modesty, and discipline in dressing and eating, amongst others, enhance racial salvation and ethical regeneration. She highlighted the perspectives of feminist scholars on eating to control fatness, viewing them as ways to exercise control and reform women's bodies (Taylor, 2017). Also, women were not allowed to sit together with men to control the sexual desires of both genders (Taylor, 2017). Women's seats were demarcated from men's seats by open spaces between them. Unlike Edward, Taylor's writing includes thoughts of feminist scholars on how NOI expresses the promises of empowerment through Black women's solidarity and how these women operated under men's authority in seemingly subjugated roles.

Therefore, Taylor (2017) argued that women in the NOI were not passive actors because the NOI provided some visibility and influence despite the gender-sexuality constraint. It was a seemingly subjugated role because it was not a total or forced one (so women who were pleased with the movement's theological doctrine renounced their membership), as women have a choice. More significantly, few women, such as Bernstein Sharrieff, whom Fard elevated to the status of a reformer, occupied leadership roles (Taylor, 2017). However, on a large scale, women performed homemaking and motherhood and supported men's leadership. In the name of reclaiming Black dignity and pride, liberation, and racial salvation, many women in the NOI chose these roles as active agents in the movement. She offered balanced work that addresses the NOI's root motive and evaluates the movement's actions. The NOI was established on the motive or promise of Black people's empowerment; in the case of women, salvation from White people's stereotypes of hypersexuality of Black women, but at the same time, the movement reinforced men's domination (Taylor, 2017). Unlike Weisenfeld Judith's book *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration*, Taylor not only states the operational beliefs and practices in the NOI but also critiques the treatment of women through her methodologies to show that women gain racial respect and protection from the NOI within the gender-sexuality restrictions and rigidity of heteronormative society.

Taylor explored intersectional, archival, and oral histories to present women's voices and theological approaches to provide scriptural sources. Her work was multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, functional in theological studies, women's studies, gender and sexuality studies, and history. Her research addressed sexuality within the NOI, but it was not in conversation with the interrelationships between queer perspectives and NOI heteronormative thought. Nevertheless, Taylor's work focused on women in the NOI, whereas Weisenfeld employed a comparative approach to examine various New Religious Movements in the US.

Weisenfeld's (2017) book explored the history of Black religious identity in the early 20th Century, the

period of the Great Migration. She argued that during this period, Black New Religious Movements such as the Nation of Islam, Moorish Science Temple, Peace Mission Movement, and Ethiopian Hebrew functioned as spaces for empowerment and salvation and sites that reshaped Black racial identity for Black racial salvation, autonomy, dignity, and pride. She explored different primary and secondary sources to examine how these religio-racial movements understood the black self and history, and how members of these movements employed that understanding to reject the imposed false identities imposed on them by White people and reclaim their lost identities (Weisenfeld, 2017). She employed a multidisciplinary approach to illustrating the historical, cultural, and religious dimensions of her study. Her book is robust, drawing on pictures, letters, sermons, material artifacts, personal testimonies, advertisements, archival materials, and organizational records to show how the movements empowered the Black race and regulated women's gender and sexual roles (Weisenfeld, 2017).

Her work identified racial salvation as the guiding ideology of the Nation, and her discussion centered on it, leading to moral reform, self-reliance, and racial dignity. Racial identity was typically gendered as men protecting women through codified behavioral patterns and religious rules and regulations. Men were viewed as protectors, and women as homemakers. The Fruit of Islam, a military organization within NOI, was established to fight against White (tagged as the devil) and was charged with the responsibility of protecting members. Men dominated this unit and were committed to protecting NOI women (Weisenfeld, 2017). Part of the topic of this paper was derived from this, which sounds exciting and pregnant with interpretations. It could mean that men in the NOI value women, or men see women as weak beings that could only be protected by men. It was prohibited for women and men to shake hands; as Taylor noted earlier, they could not sit close to one another (Weisenfeld, 2017). Her work stated how racial salvation determined the gender-sexuality regulations and manifestation in the NOI without judging. She discussed the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality. Her book focused on a diverse religious movement, making her different from Taylor, who focused on NOI. The study of religious movements broadened her work and gave readers a deeper understanding of race, gender, and sexuality in African American communities. The comparative method of examining race, gender, sexuality, fashion, theology, and food, among others, made her work comprehensive and accessible to readers, enabling them to understand the role of religion in the African American struggle for liberation. It would help to include the book's testimonies from individuals, especially women, about the NOI.

In *Inside the Nation of Islam: A Historical and Personal Testimony by a Black Muslim*, White argued that NOI is the "oldest and most stable black nationalist organization in the United States" (White, 2001, p.1). The book considered NOI's history and operations from 1930 to 2001. From the insider perspective, it is argued that NOI was focused on and grounded in Black empowerment and racial salvation from the beginning. However, under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan (1978 to present), NOI's attention shifted toward materialism and politics, and the movement is experiencing division and corruption, which differ from its initial goals of Black liberation and racial uplift (White, 2001).

Regarding gender, White noted that women served as security guards at mosques, but "they primarily functioned as housewives" (White, 2001, p. 77). According to White, most women "held ambitions of attending colleges and universities," but the "majority never achieved degrees in higher education" (White, 2001, p.77). He did not expressly state why these women could not achieve their education goals. Was it the NOI that made or told them not to attend school? White later portrayed NOI as responsible for their inability to

attend school, saying that these women "substituted their desire for education with labor for the Nation" (White, 2001, p. 77). It was pathetic, as he stated that these women, despite their loyalty, dedication, and commitment to the NOI's work, "were not respected as equal partners with the men" (White, 2001, p.77). He cited an example of sister Dabney, who has two postgraduate degrees in Law and Philosophy, but the NOI only offered her the post of secretary. White's wife has a degree in engineering, but she was posted to the kitchen as a baker. Even as a man, he expressed his fear that he would not be able to achieve his goals if he stayed with the NOI because of its hypocrisy.

White's book revealed how NOI limited women's potential and hindered their achievement of goals. However, as women's issues are significant and controversial, the discussion of women deserved more than the three pages White devoted to the NOI's discourse on women. His perspectives on NOI and women in the book are primarily negative, which raises the question: Is there nothing good that NOI has done or contributed to Black communities? This makes his work different from that of other scholars, such as Taylor, Weisenfeld, and Curtis, who have emphasized empowerment and racial pride as benefits of NOI. The view of White was a substantial concern that could be balanced with some of the contributions of NOI, just like Therese Saliba (2002) did in her article titled "Introduction: Gender Politics and Islam." She argued that since women participate in religious and nationalist movements, "women often achieve some form of political agency, self-realization, or self-representation, as well as a sense of community, even as the patriarchal values and discourses of the movements limit this agency" (Saliba, 2002, p.4)

Islam does not have a "monolithic impact on women's lives," as White discussed in a few pages of his book (Saliba, 2002, p.4). Saliba (2002) further noted that Islam is no longer oppressive to women, but the secular State is. She presented Islamic theology as being progressive and changing to adjust to societal needs, but what has really changed in how Islam treats women? Saliba's work was written for mainstream Islam, not specifically for the Nation of Islam. Still, her discussions apply to NOI because NOI picked its roots from Islam, and her thoughts were like the submissions of Taylor, Curtis, and Weisenfeld on gender. Still, Saliba's work excluded race and how this related to women's liberation because her writing centered on mainstream Islam. Saliba's write-up also suggests that the discourse about women is complex in the mainstream. For Muslims or insiders such as Wadud Amina, Nicholas Awde, and Barazangi Nimat Hafez, women and men have mutually compatible, supportive relationships defined by the Qur'an (Muslim scripture) (Wadud, 1999; Nicholas, 2006; Barazangi, 2004). However, these scholars noted that for outsiders, relationships were seen as restrictive, but the rules must be followed to be an adherent of the religion or movement.

Having established the complexity in both mainstream Islam and the NOI, this paper returned to the discourse on racial salvation and gender-sexuality in the NOI. In *Black Muslims in the US*, Rashid examined the political dimension of Islam to reconstruct (i) "Flawed theories and methods used to explain Muslim behavior, (ii) Inaccurate portrayals of Muslims that include the marginalization of black Muslims in the Islam in America literature, (iii) Scholarly biased in explanations of Islam and Muslims, and (iv) Myths ranging from the erroneous and misleading labeling of jihad as "holy war" or all black Muslims as "converts" to historians' depictions of black Muslim resistance fighting as 'slave insurrection,' "slave rebellions," "slave militias," "slave conspiracies" and "slave revolts" (Rashid, 2013, p. 3). His discussion of these centered on Black Sunnis, which he referred to as the most prominent Sunni Muslim group in the United States (Rashid, 2013). The black Sunni Muslim group has not received significant scholarly attention because it is often linked

to NOI, a quasi-Islamic movement led by Louis Farrakhan, which lacks a sufficiently large population to warrant such attention (Rashid, 2013). It is shocking to know that the number determines what scholars' study. It is significant for him to discuss what led to the decline in the population, because the Nation once had many followers. Also, Rashid revealed in this instance why there is a dearth of studies on NOI, especially on women in NOI. He scholars' political Islam through the patriarchal leadership of the movement, with the exclusion of women's voice in the political affairs of the movement.

Contrary to Rashid's book, Gibson and Karim's (2014) book focused on women in the NOI. Gibson and Karim employed oral testimonies and archival documents to study the role of women in the NOI from 1930 to 2000. These two scholars argued that most accounts of NOI came through the voices of male leaders such as Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, and Louis Farrakhan, and women's voices were often missing. Also, when NOI women were described, they were presented through the men's voice. The book examined how women experienced, understood, and contributed to the NOI amid the movement's patriarchal structure (Gibson & Karim, 2014). They also asserted that the NOI was appealing to many African Americans due to the racial climate of the United States of America (Gibson & Karim, 2014). The story of women in NOI varies depending on the writer's perspective. It is often "far more positive than indicated by feminist critiques of the NOI and other scholarly and popular histories of the Nation" (Gibson & Karim, 2014, p. 2). These scholars held that those who saw more negative than positive in women's role and place in the Nation have presented and understood women's experiences out of context, and the accounts needed to be given from the perspective of women in NOI.

They argued that women occupied a place of pride in NOI, but some of the evidence cited is missing. For example, Clara Poole, Elijah's wife, joined the Nation because of its principles of respectability and patriarchy. She served as the Supreme Secretary of the Nation during Elijah's incarceration and absence, but her role needed to be documented (Gibson & Karim, 2014). Gibson and Karim (2014) reported that Clara worked hard, visited incarcerated members and other members, and during this period, NOI owed its survival to her. However, the Nation lost many members because of constant police harassment, which brought fear into the hearts of many people (Gibson & Karim, 2014). This answered the question of whether the NOI has a high population. With a large or small population, the voice of women is worth studying in the Nation.

Women in NOI helped shape the movement's identity by shaping the community and mediating between the Nation and communities. Many of these women accepted the traditional gender norm of male leadership and restrictions to resist systemic racism. Their ethical practice of family values, modesty, and moral behaviors served as a means of moral empowerment for women against harassment. Just as Weisenfeld, Gibson, and Karim (2014) noted, NOI's men believed they must protect women. Their book is insightful, has contributed to the study of women's NOI, and has provided a new way of knowing the Nation by focusing on women's agency and voice as active participants in the NOI. The intersectionality between religion, race, and gender was well articulated in the book. This book offers an extensive periodization, creating space for a comprehensive examination of various movement leaders, feminist thought, and women's voices. The book relied more on oral histories than on archival materials, providing more first-hand data. The scholars undermined the role of the Qur'an in the formation of NOI theology by stating that it played a little role in shaping Elijah's gender ideas (Gibson & Karim, 2014). Suppose the gender ideas that include the covering of the head, wearing long skirts, and having women primarily playing domestic roles stemmed from postwar

mass culture; why are these gender phenomena common in Islam? What is this postwar mass culture?

In "Rethinking Race and the Nation of Islam, 1930–1975," Algernon Austin (2003) argued that the Nation is rooted in Asiatic theology and identity. Therefore, he challenged scholars who over-concentrated on the Black nationalist ideology of the movement. The Asiatic theology distinguishes the Nation from other movements. He stated that "scholars had defined the organization as Pan-African when, in fact, the organization asserted a non-physical appearance-based racial identity: 'Asiatic.' This identity is at the core of the religious teachings and is the basis for many of the cultural practices of members of the Nation throughout its history" (Austin, 2003, p. 52). His submission resonates with the thesis of this paper, which points to the need to consider the attachment the Nation has with Islam as a way of understanding the complexity of the gender and sexuality manifestation in the NOI. The gender and sexuality constraints in the NOI are like traditional Islamic gender and sexuality manifestations. For example, in Deborah Gray White's (2017) book *Lost in the USA: American Identity from the Promise Keepers to the Million Mom March*, Louis Farrakhan was strongly identified as a well-known homophobe, sexist, anti-Christianity, and anti-Semitism. This Islamic rigidity exists in the Nation because the NOI theology was adopted from Islam. Austin's (2003) work is viable and in-depth, using historical and comparative analysis and sociological context. His scholarship did not address the discourse of race, gender, and sexuality. Still, his work calls scholars to re-evaluate the idea that NOI is predominantly established on Black nationalist ideology, and it also links readers to the roots of the gender and sexuality constraints in the Nation.

His article was in conversation with Kambiz GhaneaBassiri's (2010, p. 2) book, titled *A History of Islam in America*. The book explored the "abiding presence and diversity of Muslims in the United States by reference to its historical context" from the 17th to the 21st centuries, and how they defined themselves and their religion in relation to race, national identity, and religious pluralism in the US. He stated that Wallace Deen Muhammad, later known as Warith Deen Mohammad, became the leader of the Nation after the death of his father, Elijah Muhammad, on February 25, 1975. W. D Mohammad converted members of the Nation to a "more mainstream understanding of Islam" (Kambiz, 2010, p. 284). He further argued that members of the NOI "did not contextualize their adoption of mainstream Islamic beliefs and rituals in the context of Sunni Islam or Islamic history; rather, they contextualized their conversion in the context of African American history" (Kambiz, 2010, pp. 285-286). He needed to add that Islamic theology was contextualized in the history and realities of African America, but the footprints of Islam were still visible in the NOI.

In "Take Three: The Modern American Body: Embodying the Nation of Islam," Curtis (2018) explored how the NOI employed embodied practices such as discipline, dress codes, and diet to gain racial salvation, sovereignty, and end White Supremacy. He argued that the strategy is a powerful weapon of resistance, both religious, cultural, and political, through which the movement was formed and operated. His paper focused on the 1930s to 1970s, and the latter part falls within that time frame. He employed theories of embodiment from scholars such as Talal Asad to explain the impact of religion on the formation of social and physical identity for NOI members (Curtis, 2018). He also employed visual, historical, and textual analysis of images and archival documents. He offered a balanced presentation of gender discourse on NOI. He noted that the Fruit of Islam functioned as a military organ of the Nation, and most had men as members with different ranks. The Fruit of Islam served as a space for educational activities, including the study of religious texts and catechisms (Curtis, 2018). Women also participated in the Fruit of Islam marching parade. They faced

different challenges, and one of them was that "even selling Muhammad Speaks newspapers became a religious obligation for members of the Fruit, who might be criticized or punished for failing to meet sales quotas" (Curtis, 2018, p. 427). Women were enrolled under Muslim Girls Training-General Civilization to learn cooking, sewing, spelling, penmanship, hygiene, child-rearing, and other subjects considered essential to being a wife and mother" (Curtis, 2018, p. 427). He stated that women who wore nonconforming clothes and had sex outside of wedlock were punished under the ethical commandments of the NOI. Curtis did not specify the punishment, but he made it clear that both males and females faced the restrictions. What happened to men who had sex out of wedlock? The Nation placed much expectation on women in the struggle for racial salvation. Hence, he added that some women often resisted the authority or ignored them" (Curtis, 2018, p. 427). It is understandable that the great expectations placed on NOI women were burdensome and led to resistance within the space they occupied to resist gender discrimination, violence, and racism. Ignoring authority cannot address issues like withdrawing from the movement, because if one is a member, one must adhere to the rules. The issue of gender constraints and how some women resisted it revealed how little some women knew about NOI before joining the movement.

Sylvia Chan-Malik (2018), in *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam*, examined the significance of safety and security to Muslim women and how this defined Islam as a space for safety and protection, resistance, and community building, but also as a source of violence for women due to gender and sexual constraints in the mid-20th Century. Using Toni Morrison's "Safe Harbor" concept, she noted that women, before accepting Islam, saw themselves as neither white nor male and "that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them." (Sylvia Chan-Malik, 2018, p.35). They, therefore, concentrated on themselves, finding solutions to sexual harassment and violence, and Islam served as a safe harbor for Muslim women. She used NOI as one of the Islamic movements for discussion on Black Muslim women in the US and how Black Muslim women were domesticated by men and done by women's consent and participation (Sylvia Chan-Malik, 2018). She noted that the rigid structure of the NOI was perceived as a restriction on public space.

In contrast, in the private space, amongst some members, it was a source of empowerment for racial salvation and to become a respectable Black woman, which comes with some constraints (Sylvia Chan-Malik, 2018). She revealed that the Qur'an (Qur'an 4:34) instructed Muslim men to protect and respect their women, and it forbade domestic violence against women (Sylvia Chan-Malik, 2018). She provided a well-detailed analysis of media portrayals of Black Muslim women, supported by interviews, autobiographies by Black Muslim women, and archival sources. This book shows that Black Muslim women were not oppressed people who were voiceless or passive. She also described the intersections of race, religion, gender, and social justice by connecting them to the Black Power and feminist movements.

Conclusion

Having reviewed the works of these scholars on gender-sexuality as it relates to NOI women, this study posits that scholars viewed women as being attracted to NOI by the promised liberation and freedom from racism, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination from White supremacists, which led to empowerment and racial salvation. Women were stated to be instrumental in the achievement of racial salvation through respectability, sexual control, reproduction, discipline, and modesty, and these expectations restricted selfhood and embraced living for collectiveness. Some women resisted the constraints, and they

later renounced their membership in the NOI. Scholars have revealed that the voices of NOI women were not well captured in scholarship, which opened the door to misrepresentation of the place and role of women in the NOI. It is a truism that scholars who relied on testimonies from NOI women tended to have a history of empowerment rather than constraints. At the same time, outsiders concentrate more on constraints than empowerment. The realities of empowerment and constraint in the struggle for racial salvation made the study of race, gender, and sexuality in the NOI a complex subject that requires objectivity, verification, and re-verification of data to achieve balanced research. This paper also examined the source of gender and sexual constraints in NOI. This study discovered that some scholars saw the NOI as a purely Black nationalist movement and picked its ideology from Black nationalism. In contrast, some scholars saw it as adopting Islamic theology contextualized into African American experiences. This study posited that both the women's empowerment and gender-sexuality constraints in the Nation are connected to African American racial salvation and Islamic theology, and they should be examined by considering these two aspects.

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