Introduction

With the fall of the Iron Curtain an era in global politics came to an end, as the Western world no longer could define itself in opposition to communism. During the past few years, we have witnessed a return to a previous pattern in which the Occident seeks its raison d'être by placing itself in opposition to Islam. As it did during the Cold War, the United States still portrays itself as the defender of liberty against totalitarian barbarism, but the symbols of evil are no longer taken from the so-called Evil Empire but from the Muslim world. Saddam Hussein and Mu'ammar al-Qadhdhafi are portrayed as megalomaniac gangsters worthy of an Ian Fleming novel and are made to represent Islam in the dichotomy of them/us, despite the fact that Hussein maintains a secular Pan-Arabian version of nationalist socialism as champion for the Iraqi Ba'ath Party and the Islamic Socialist Mu'ammar al-Qadhdhafi espouses controversial deviations from mainstream Sunni Islam.

As was the case during the Cold War, this dichotomy is reflected in popular culture by the movie industry. In productions such as *Not without My Daughter* and *True Lies,* Muslims replace communists as the scary aliens, the subhuman merciless incarnations of evil bent on destroying what is good and decent. Defenders of the valuable way of life are justified in exterminating this robot-like enemy who is beyond reason and human emotions. The link between Arnold Schwarzenegger's Arab hunt in *True Lies* and the onslaught on Arab civilians in Operation Desert Storm is obvious: the victims were mere stereotypes, impossible to identify with. CNN blurred the distinction between drama and reality in a war enacted as a live-action spectacle in our living rooms.

The reason for returning to the opposition between the West and Islam

is due not only to tradition but also to the global ambitions of both parties. When Francis Fukuyama asserted that the defeat of communism signaled an "end of history" and a worldwide ideological consensus in favor of secular liberal democracy, his vision, as Mark Juergensmeyer notes, was belied by the rise of new religious and ethnical nationalism.[1] Not only is the centripetal movement of global integration challenged by the centrifugal movement of ethnical fragmentation, but the West's claim to a rationale for global consensus is also challenged. When President Bush proclaimed victory for the "New World Order," he was offering a predated vision of global hegemony for the American model of society.

Akbar Ahmed suggests that instead of the clumsy global classifications of First, Second, Third World, North-South, East-West, the world map of the 1990s can be divided into two major categories: "civilizations that are exploding, reaching out, expanding, bubbling with scientific ideas, economic plans, political ambitions, cultural expressions and those that are imploding, collapsing on themselves with economic, political and social crises which prevent any serious attempts at major initiatives.[2] Though perhaps overly simplified, Ahmed's perspective is still illuminative for an understanding of the global trends of the 1990s. The imploding nations, for example the few remnants of communist countries such as the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea, pose no serious threat to the exploding civilizations. In the present process of shaping a world culture or a global civilization, the "American" impact is set forth with a self-confident arrogance. The term "American" is not used here as a national or geographical but a cultural concept, as its exploding character already transcends nationality and geography. I choose the term "American" because the United States is taking the lead in and English is the lingua franca of a civilization that includes other nations and linguistic groups in the West, East, North, and South. This exploding civilization with global ambitions is characterized by consumerism, and its cultural impact is felt wherever we find McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Pizza Hut, CNN, Madonna, MTV, Mickey Mouse, Levi's, *Dallas,* and other cultural symbols. "It also has a sacred pilgrimage place," Ahmed notes. "Disneyland is like the Vatican for the Catholics, Makkah for the Muslims and Amritsar for the Sikhs. An entire civilization is here defined and many generations, in their millions, visit it."[3] Unlike Mecca, the Vatican, or Amritsar, Disneyland can be duplicated: there are now two in the United States, one in France, and one in Japan, which reveals this civilization's ability to transcend ethnicity and geography as nonwhite societies like Japan can align

with "America" through, for example, one of this civilization's most powerful bodies, the G-7.

Beneath the surface of glimmering consumerism is a belief in liberal democracy, capitalist economy, and secular politics. At its best it promotes freedom of speech, intellectual pursuits, scientific endeavors, emancipation of women, and individual liberties. Had the self-presented saga of "American" civilization been the true story and its advantages been, as promised, inclusively intended, its project might have realized the success so arrogantly asserted. Concealed behind ideological ideal images is the backyard of global poverty, racism, sexism, classism, and the totalitarian denial of peoples' right to self-determination. The gulf separating professed ideals and experienced reality provides fertile soil for alternative ideologies.

Islam is the most rapidly expanding religion in the world and is presently the only other exploding civilization with global ambitions. It checks unrestrained materialism with spirituality and points to the aforementioned backyard conditions as evidence of the failure of man's self-sufficiency: If this does not work, why not try the way of God? Far from a proposal based on a rejection of man's capabilities, Islam believes in man's ability as God's vicegerent to establish a benign society. Islam, its advocators claim, provides social justice for all of mankind and is the guarantor against poverty, racism, classism, and sexual degradation of women. As complete a vision of civilization as the "American," Islam provides an alternative model of democracy, economy, and politics, thereby formulating a true challenge to Bush's New World Order.

In the process of polarization, Islamist ideologists launch alternative stereotypes, in which the Westerner represents "the Other." Fundamental to Islam are the dichotomies between *dar al-Islam* (the abode of Islam) and *dar al-kufr* (the abode of unbelievers), between *dar al-salaam* (the abode of peace) and *dar al-harb* (the abode of war). In Arabic, the word for the West is *gharb,* which also signifies the place of darkness and the incomprehensible. *Gharib* is the alien and *gharaba* means "strangeness."[4] In Islamist thought, "American" culture is depraved, immoral, and Godless and represents a compassionless threat to the valuable way of life. An extreme Islamist is justified in killing foreigners in Egypt or Algeria to protect what is good and decent using a logic akin to the Western legitimation for killing Muslims. The victim is subhuman, an image, impossible to identify with.

In the context of a revived juxtaposition between imaginary "America"

and "Islam" it may be interesting to observe Islam as an American religion. Immigrants and guest students comprise the large majority of American Muslims, with a variety of individuals from more than sixty nations who represent not only different linguistic, racial, national, and ethnical categories,[5] but also different cultural and religious categories, as Islam is far from the monolithic entity imagined by many of its advocators and opponents. Estimates of the total number of Muslims in the United States vary considerably, but a reasonable figure for 1993 would be approximately eight million, including an estimated three million African American Muslims. There are more than 1,200 mosques of all sizes located throughout the United States, although 70 percent of the Muslim population is concentrated to ten states: California, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Indiana, Michigan, Virginia, Texas, Ohio, and Maryland.[6]

Islam is thus well on its way to surpassing Judaism as the second largest religion in the United States, dwarfing also classic Protestant denominations such as the influential Episcopal church. Divinely mandated to summon all of mankind, the Muslim *dawa* (mission) in the West is bound to make an imprint on American society, and a far from insignificant number of American converts are found in this western *umma* (community of believers). The greatest impact has been made in the African American community, although the call has not gone unheard among Americans of European or Latin American descent. The overwhelming majority of American Muslims keep a low or apolitical profile, a fact that is perhaps overshadowed by the February 26, 1993, bombing of the World Trade Center and the subsequent arrest of Egyptian Islamist Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman. A national coordination of American Muslim organizations was first attempted in 1952, and political lobbying has begun only relatively recently.[7] Muslim Political Action Committees (PACs) focus on "Islamic issues," mainly in the field of foreign policy, and in domestic matters strive to secure nondiscriminatory free exercise of religion. Whatever sympathies or antipathies American Muslims feel for the rising surge of Islamism (improperly known as "fundamentalism") in the Muslim world are largely expressed within the confines of their own community and do not reach the outer society.

Vociferous exceptions do exist, however, mainly in the African American community. The present study focuses on the most renowned and controversial of these groups, the Nation of Islam (NOI). This organization was established during the Great Depression in the rapidly expanding inner-city ghettos of the industrial North. The Nation was from the very

beginning exclusively black and formulated emphatic political demands. The United States was depicted as the modern Babylon soon to be destroyed by the wrath of God, whereupon the blacks would ascend to their predestined position as world rulers. We see in the NOI a combination of the notion of militant Islam and the legacy of classic black nationalism, and the movement produced some of the leading African American nationalists of the twentieth century: Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and Louis Farrakhan. The controversial positions of the Nation quickly attracted the attention of mainstream media and American domestic security agencies. In 1962, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) described the NOI as "an organization which is violently anti-white, anti-Christian, anti-integration and anti-United States."[8] Infiltrated and monitored since World War II, when the Nation supported Japan in what was seen as a war against white world supremacy, the movement strengthened its position as the largest black nationalist organization in the United States. The politico-religious influence the Nation undoubtedly enjoys in the African American community, not least among the urban youth, does not cease to dismay the official United States.

The present leader of the NOI, Minister Louis Farrakhan Muhammad, frequently makes headlines. Farrakhan was the strong man behind the 1995 Million Man March, which turned out to be the greatest black manifestation thus far in the history of the United States. He accepts financial aid from Libya, expressed sympathy for Manuel Noriega, and pledged his support for Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War. Speaking out in 1992 during the bloodiest uprising of the twentieth century, in Los Angeles, Farrakhan said that violence was the only resort of the oppressed and stressed that unless justice is created, America will be doomed: "the worst is yet to come."[9] Farrakhan is said to be a "reverse racist," an "anti-Semite," a "black Hitler," a "bigot," a "hate monger," a "demagogue," and an "Islamic fundamentalist." Despite the fact that the Nation's opinions are frequently debated, qualitative research is rare. Studies on the Nation, with some notable exceptions, have been based mainly on secondary sources of information due in part to the unwillingness of the NOI to be an object of academic inquiries.[10] The present study, which is mainly based on field research, recorded interviews, taped lectures, and the writings of the movement's spokespersons, aims to correct this unsatisfactory situation by presenting a comprehensive modern history of the Nation of Islam, with a particular focus on its "Second Resurrection" commenced in 1977.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide a background and summary descriptions of classic black nationalism and black American Islam prior to the "First Resurrection" of the NOI in 1930. Chapter 3 traces the rise and development of the Nation of Islam during the earthly presence of the Messenger of God, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, between the years 1930 and 1975. The counterintelligence activities that the FBI directed against the Nation are the subject of chapter 4, which includes a discussion of the murder of Malcolm X. Chapter 5 describes the Islamization process initiated by Messenger Muhammad's successor, his son Wallace D. (later Warithuddin) Muhammad, a process that transformed the movement into a nonradical, depoliticized, mainstream Sunni Muslim organization. This process is known as "the fall" by the believers in Farrakhan's NOI. The second resurrection that began when Louis Farrakhan assumed the role of Peter in fulfillment of the Scriptures, is the subject of chapter 6, which also includes a discussion of the Messiology of the NOI. Chapter 7 is a lengthy discussion and analysis of the complex NOI creed, a discourse that hopefully will facilitate an understanding beyond the simplified media reports. The shifting relations between the NOI and the Muslim world are discussed in chapter 8, including the Libyan connection and a presentation of some minor black nationalist Islamic organizations in the United States. The role of the NOI in the predominantly Christian black community is the subject of the first section of chapter 9. That chapter's second section discusses the alleged anti-Semitism of Farrakhan and the NOI. The third section of chapter 9 turns its attention to the relationship between the NOI and white far-right nationalist organizations, or the so-called Nazi connection. Finally, the role and function of the NOI in contemporary American society is examined in chapter 10. Militant Islam as part of black youth culture, with its musical missionaries in the hip-hop movement are discussed, as well as the NOI's positions and practical activities in a wide range of fields, including its struggles to rid the black communities of drugs and crime and to realize African American empowerment and self-determination.

This study adopts a hermeneutically oriented emic perspective, which accounts for its narrative style. When I, for instance, write that "God came in the person of Master Farad Muhammad," or "the naive quest of the white devil to prolong his rule," this does not mean that I necessarily subscribe to what is stated, only that believers do. To prefix each matter of belief with an "according to" would not only take the thrill out of a fascinating and suggestive story, it would also be an implicit way to take

exception to the "bizarre beliefs" of the Other. While an "according to" qualification is employed when necessary for the sake of clarity, I prefer when possible to write from the perspective of the believer. This in no way makes me a believer, and I, as a researcher, have the great advantage of not even being able to apply for membership. I am a white devil, which, in this respect, is rather convenient. While my colleagues often run the risk of, at one point or another, being viewed as prospects for conversion, I am not expected to believe or, I suspect, even to understand things properly. When Minister Farrakhan gave me permission to conduct this study at a May 1989 meeting in his Chicago South Side Palace, he told me to investigate everything from every angle. I should go to his backers and enemies alike and shun no effort to be objective. My intention is to present my findings as truthfully as possible, yet objectivity is a misleading honorific label and nonapplicable to humanistic and social research. Any human understanding of an object goes via the subject's mind as medium and is thus transformed into a subjective image of the object observed; it can only be grasped through the filter of perception, structured by the observer's frame of reference. What is presented here is my understanding of the Nation of Islam, its history, ideology, relations, roles, functions, and transformative processes. Although efforts are made to combine an emic perspective with etic analysis, the final result can never be equated with fundamental truth, nor with the image of the Nation from the actor's point of view.

Throughout this study the concepts *black, African American, Blackman,* and *Blackamerican* are used interchangeably for denoting Americans of African descent, the latter two being used in NOI literature and sermons. The word *black* is used in the terminology of the Nation of Islam both as a national/racial concept and as a theological one, signifying the Original People, goodness, and Godliness, and, as such, transcends the color of skin. A Native American, a Native Hawaiian, a Hispanic, and an African American are all "black" at this level of meaning. The contextual usage of the term will clarify on which semantic level it should be understood.

Other concepts of central significance for this thesis are *nation, nationalism,* and *religious nationalism,* terms that require a short discussion due to the fact that their definitions are unclear and ambiguous, differing considerably in meaning from user to user, across time and space. Although nationalists, like Mu'ammar al-Qadhdhafi and others, ascribe *nation* a permanence of existence, as if nations were as old as

human history, the modern usage of the word stems from the eighteenth century.[11] It became popularized through political usage meant to produce feelings of loyalty and solidarity between a people and a state. Contrary to the a priori definition of *nation* claimed by nationalists, *nation* is defined a posteriori, that is, nationalism produces the nation and not the other way around.

A *nation* is an imagined community of people founded on selected criteria as language, history, culture, destiny, and religion, to which sentiments of belonging, loyalty, and solidarity are attached, together with a theory, if not a practice, of legitimate political authority. Here I differ from Juergensmeyer, who defines the nation as "a community of people associated with a particular political culture and territory that possesses autonomous political authority."[12] Accomplished independence as a criterion would make the concept too narrow, as it would exclude a great number of self-defined nations, like the Kurd, Basque, and Tibetan. In my usage, the nation names a collectively articulated ambition to achieve political independence, either in a separate state or in a confederation.

Nationalism is an ideology that gives priority to the *nation* over other imagined communities such as class and gender. A nationalist believes that a woman has more in common with men of the same nation than with women of another nation. Explicitly exclusive and easily aligned with chauvinism, racism, and xenophobia, nationalism postulates the unique and corporate character of the nation, to which a defined system of meaning is ascribed. Nationalism produces national awareness and national identity by references to a perceived origin, constructed through a nostalgic projection of the nation back into a legendary time, a shared history, and an envisioned destiny. Nationalism can be political and/or cultural. Politically, national self-determination is said to be the only legitimate form of political administration, either in a sovereign state or as part of a federation. Cultural nationalism seeks to preserve particular features, like handicrafts, language, clothing, festivities, music, and sports, which are considered to be generic to the national identity.

Religious nationalism postulates that nations are divine creations with specific God-given purposes and features. The nation is often believed to stand in a unique relationship with the Creator(s), from which both specific obligations and exclusive rights are derived. Nations are thus ascribed certain roles in the grand divine design known as the history of mankind, the outcome of which frequently is revealed and included as central to the national identity. One's own nation is often regarded as the

predestined leader of the nations of the earth. Frequently collateral to this thesis is the belief that members of the "chosen nation" are themselves reflections of the divine. Here we encounter a mystic knowledge, a national gnosis, asserting that world history will conclude in the foundation of a nation of gods. Religious nationalists of this variety usually combine this notion with a vision of an apocalyptic battle, enacted between nations divine and diabolic. The Nation of Islam belongs to this category, and I hereby invite the reader for a fascinating journey into the world of black Islamic nationalism in the United States of America.