RHETORIC AS PRAXIS: A MODEL FOR DECONSTRUCTING HERMENEUTIC DISCOURSE

THESIS

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By

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This study proposes a model for the deconstruction of nationalism. Nationalism is a discursive construct. This construct manifests in ideologies and formalizes order. Individuals should question these institutions in order to achieve legitimate societal participation. This criticism can be accomplished through self-reflection.

The model demonstrates that sanctioned individual(s) provide interpretations of events. These interpretations recycle authority. The hermeneutic obscures an individual's understanding of the originating fact. Self-reflection allows an individual, such as Malcolm X in the Nation of Islam, to come closer to discovering the original fact.

Critiquing the hermeneutic can reveal the imperfections of the message(s). Revealing the imperfections of an ideology is the first step to the liberation of the individual and society.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study argues that individuals should question instituted realities that govern their lives. One of the more pervasive realities is nationalism. Questioning the ideology of nationalism enables individuals to achieve legitimate societal participation. This chapter provides the foundation for this inquiry. The problem that raised these questions will be discussed in the first section. In the second section, contributory studies will be discussed. The second section examines and evaluates the writings of Jurgen Habermas and Hans-Georg Gadamer. The third section will address the justification for this study. The chapter concludes with the design of the study.

Statement of the Problem

Human interaction from the ancient to the modern era poses a paradoxical dilemma for rhetorical scholars to decipher. Individuals, as societal participants of discursive constructs, are confronted by the universal problem as with what they interact. From antiquity to the present the question has been raised: What is reality?¹ Furthermore, the connection of rhetoric and the perception of reality has been an area of scholarly concern.² The
problem seems to hinge on the answer to two questions: To what extent is an instituted reality discursively constructed?; and what extent should cognitive participation play in the construction of reality? The next section discusses the pertinent seminal rhetorical and philosophical works that have raised the questions this study addresses.

Contributory Studies

The crux of the rhetorical problem at hand is the relationship of communication between the discursive participants and tradition. Two major figures of philosophy have dealt with this question. First, Habermas has caught the imagination of many rhetorical and philosophical scholars.\(^3\) Although Habermas is not a rhetorician, per se, his critical theory of communication appeals to rhetorical scholars. His theory addresses an area often overlooked by more traditional rhetorical approaches. This area is the restoration of cognitive participation by all involved in discursive transactions.

Second, Gadamer also has caught the attention of many rhetorical and philosophical scholars because of his alternate view of discursive participation.\(^4\) The communicative theory of Gadamer stems from hermeneutical phenomenology, which explicates a different approach to the participatory function of language.

The writings of Habermas and Gadamer are philosophically opposed.\(^5\) First, Habermas argues that
societal participants should strive to free themselves from an instituted reality. These instituted realities are often rooted in tradition. It is tradition that Habermas seeks to question. He contends that participation will free individuals from the tyranny of tradition. Habermas supports his arguments by providing scholars with an exhaustive analysis of human knowledge and experience within the public sphere.

According to Habermas, three transcendental a priori factors or universal conditions govern human experience and activity. These factors include work, interaction, and power. Humans work to provide the material aspects of existence, interact in the created social groups, and encounter the forms of power emanating from the discursively constructed social order. Communication becomes dysfunctional when unnecessary power controls human existence in the guise of ideology.

Habermas argues that the process of critical theory or critical thinking can be used to question the legitimacy of ideologies. Through this process, which Habermas calls praxis, humans can achieve a greater autonomy from unnecessary forms of control. Praxis can be realized through rhetoric or legitimate discursive participation. He argues that the emancipation of humans from unwanted power could lead to an ideal society. This society would be made
of free and equals who truly participate and understand the discursive social and political world.

In contrast, Gadamer argues that discursive participants should accept reality as inextricably bound to tradition. Language serves as a means of unfolding reality based on history. In his seminal works, Gadamer discusses the role of participatory language within the hermeneutic.8

The term hermeneutic originates from the Greek word *hermēnuēm* meaning to 'announce' or to 'show.'8 To announce or to show refers to unfolding the signification. For the object that is announced to gain signification, understanding is required. Thus, hermeneutics is bound to the act of understanding. Gadamer states that "The classical discipline concerned with the art of understanding texts is hermeneutics."10

According to Gadamer, the hermeneutic is a 'field.' This field functions as an active means of rediscovering the 'nodal' point of the artist's mind that renders an understanding of a phenomenon. Hermeneutic understanding is realized through language, which serves as a medium to allow the whole experience of the world to unfold.

More importantly, the hermeneutic carries the weight of history and tradition. The hermeneutic exists as an ever growing web built upon a traditional foundation. Tradition, a dimension of historical consciousness, participates with cultural heritages and attempts to reactivate the past.
Language exists as the medium for participating with this historical consciousness. Tradition regulates language within the hermeneutic, allowing the interpreter to experience and understand phenomena through the precedence of authority. Participation, according to Gadamer, consists of the interaction with the words and ideas of the past, not the abnegation thereof.

Fundamentally, a rhetorical duel between liberation and tradition occurs. Both Gadamer and Habermas recognize the importance of discursive participation on the part of the individual. However, the premise of their arguments differs. Habermas argues that discursive participation occurs when the individual questions the legitimacy of tradition. On the other hand, Gadamer contends that the individual's interaction with tradition qualifies as discursive participation.

This study will attempt to synthesize the disparate theories of Habermas and Gadamer by proposing a model. The model, Rhetoric as Praxis, seeks to expand the understanding of social and political discourse. The significance of the study will be discussed in the next section.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is twofold: theory and practice. First, the study finds its roots in the empowerment of the critical interlocutor. Habermas discusses the importance of the critic in the public sphere. His attempt to emancipate the interlocutor from the confines
of tradition echoes the goal of the Frankfurt School: "The knowledge of what Ought to be and the high moral tone of human emancipation redefine themselves in the process of newly discovering what Is, how it developed and what its tendencies are." This study seeks to pursue that goal.

Second, participation in the discursive process historically has been an area addressed by rhetorical theory and practice. Cicero foundationalized the practical discipline of rhetoric or communication. The pragmatic application of the ancient discipline of rhetoric adheres to the doctrine of critical theory. Ciceronian thought and critical theory examine the pragmatic significance of discursive participants within the public and political sphere. Civic participation by informed and critical interlocutors serves as the goal of both.

A synthesis of the disparate positions of Habermas and Gadamer could augment the perpetually growing study of rhetoric consistent with Ciceronian tradition. The model this study proposes conceptualizes Habermas' and Gadamer's arguments suggesting the place of critical thinking in civic participation.

The discursive freedom from the application seeks to foster a greater amount of legitimate interaction in a democratic society. Legitimate interaction restores the rhetorical nature of an authentic society of free and
equals. The justification of the study will be realized in the method discussed in the following section.

Design of Study

The rest of the study will be organized in three chapters. The second chapter presents the background of the phenomenon that will be operationalized within the model. First, the chapter will examine broadly the concept of nationalism as a discursive construct realized through ideology. Second, the Nation of Islam will be discussed. In the third chapter the model of praxis is proposed and operationalized in the context of the Nation of Islam. The fourth chapter addresses questions raised by the model and suggests future areas of research.
NOTES


2 Robert Scott has provided the discipline of rhetoric a profound examination of epistemic rhetoric in his seminal work "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic: Ten Years Later," Central States Speech Journal 27 (1976): 258-266.


6 The seminal theories of Habermas can be found in these sources: Jurgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston:


Gadamer, *Truth* 164.

Rhetoric as practice was first discussed by Cicero: 
CHAPTER II

NATIONALISM

One of the many domestic problems that continues to confront the United States as it progresses toward the twenty-first century is citizen unrest, often crystallizing in violent social movements of organized, marginalized peoples. Many scholars have sought to explain these movements either to provide solutions before violence occurs or to understand the reasons why violence may have occurred.

Chapter II continues the discussion, focusing on the black community headed by the Nation of Islam as a nationalistic movement. This chapter argues that scholars have difficulty defining nationalism because they do not treat it as a rhetorical construct. The lack of definition prevents social movements from being analyzed from the perspective of nationalism. This chapter attempts to overcome the definitional problem by suggesting that nationalism exists as a discursive construct. First, the historical relevance of nationalism will be presented. Second, nationalism will be defined from a rhetorical perspective. Finally, the chapter shows how the Nation of Islam is a nationalistic movement for the black community.
Historical Foundations:  
The European Experience

Nationalism is a specter creeping from the nineteenth century and continues to haunt the twentieth century. Without adequate understanding, the phenomenon threatens social stability in the twenty-first century. The purpose of this section consists of facilitating better understanding of the historical volatility of nationalism. This section suggests that while nationalism may be a worldwide phenomenon, its occurrence is primarily linked to the European community. Discussion includes four integral European nationalist moments.

Prior to the French Revolution of 1789, many of the monarchs of western Europe existed as fountainheads of political dominance; their power was unquestionable. The Hobbesian legitimation of divine right of kings sanctioned sovereign authority of the monarch over the people.¹

However, the French Revolution violently erased the political foundations of the monarch serving as a catalyst for a new epoch in Western civilization:

The King could no longer be King of France; he must (if he stayed) be King of the French, for he owed his power to the people... Much of the Revolution's mystique went into that word citoyen. The Nation, then, was born—a community of citizens sharing equally in the rights and duties, not a class of hierarchy.²

The impact of the French Revolution irrevocably altered the relationship of the people to the political institutions of western Europe. The legacy of the Jacobins, led by
Maximilien Robespierre, injected a virus moving the people of Europe to political action and identity. Because of the French Revolution, nationalism became synonymous with the people. The nation achieved its identity from the people rather than the monarch.

However, the Treaty of Vienna (1815), drafted by Prince von Clemens Metternich, restored the status quo of the European monarchs. As a result, the acquired power of the people was usurped by the 'anciene regime.' Powerless because of the restored dynasts, the leaders of the people perceived a need to rally the masses for a second movement.

The decade of the forties in the nineteenth century served as fertile breeding ground for another popular movement. Continued social, economic, and political strife afflicted Europe. The resuscitated political dynasts of western Europe did not legitimately address these issues so the faith in the political institutions began to erode. The veneration of the nation--the people--once again, superceded the honor of the state apparatus.

When discontent reached its zenith, the violent movement of the Revolution of 1848 spread like wildfire throughout Europe. Citizen unrest, different nationalisms around Europe, began to rise. On February 22-24, 1848, King Louis Philippe was overthrown by an insurrection of the 'citoyens.' This violent overthrow of the government created the newly founded French Republic. Within a matter of a week, the revolution that began in Paris found its way
into the separate German principalities. During this tumultuous period, thousands of people willingly lost their lives in the name of the 'nation.'

Nationalist movements in Europe continued to thrive throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. For example, the Risorgimento, the unification of Italy lasted, for more than 50 years. The yoke of Austrian and French imperial suppression silenced the voice of the indigenous groups of Italy. The ideas of the nationalist movement, Young Italy, was "dedicated to the expulsion of the foreigners and the unification of a democratic republic of Italy." In 1831, the leader of the popular movement, Giuseppe Mazzini, wrote that "his aim was to organize a truly Italian movement, to link all parts of Italy in a single bond, to form a great Italian national association."

The slow evolution of the Risorgimento (1815-1870), eventually constructed a unified Italy.

Nationalism, from its inception, was the attempt by the people to have control over their own political destinies. However, as the resources of nationalistic movements were recognized, often hegemonies co-opted those powers for their own Machiavellian uses. Instead of a vision emanating from the people, political establishments imposed their vision on the people for their own end.

German Nazism, for instance, was a volatile nationalist movement to ravage the twentieth century European continent.
The nationalist doctrine promulgated by the dictatorship of Adolf Hitler forced a mirror image of the ideology of the Nazi Party on the people of Germany. The Nazi vision claimed that the Aryans (the Germanic people) were destined to rule the world because of the alleged inherent supremacy of their race. Those people not of Teutonic decent were considered impure. Accordingly, the debased people of the world had to be conquered or exterminated.  

Nationalism, today, continues as an immense threat to the security of the global community. Since the late eighteenth century Europe has confronted a quagmire of nationalists movements, originating from collective unrest. For instance, nationalist groups currently are vying for control over the former country of Yugoslavia.

Many leaders and scholars express their concerns for the volatility of nationalism. John Major, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, argued against the tendencies of nationalism. In a Newsweek article, he supported the efforts to form the European Community but lamented that the force of nationalism is an acute obstacle to the unification of Europe. Major notes that there are "aspirations across the continent where nationality is strongly rooted, and nationalism is a powerful force." The Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei V. Kozyrev, claimed that "Today, ever more often one needs to counter aggressive nationalism that emerges as a new global threat." Leonard Doob asserts that
"nationalism is unquestionably one of the most important problems, if not the most important one, of this century."\textsuperscript{10} Other experts, as well, have recognized the significance of nationalism as a threat to the stability of human affairs.\textsuperscript{11}

For the most part, studies of U.S. collective unrest treat the discordant phenomena as a social movement.\textsuperscript{12} This treatment has been particularly the case regarding civic unrest during the 1960s and 1970s. Approaching the collectives from a nationalistic perspective for the most part has been overlooked. This omission is so because in the United States, nationalism is generally considered a European disease. The United States is assumed to be a 'melting pot,' where nations end and the 'people' begin. However, the existence of many nations within the United States is without question. Walt Whitman, in \textit{Leaves of Grass}, noted: "Here is not merely a nation but a teeming nation of nations."\textsuperscript{13}--a synnationalism emerging from nationalisms.\textsuperscript{14}

The next section will argue that nationalism affects the U.S. polity domestically. The reason that nationalism is overlooked in collective unrest is due to definitional problems. The section will review these perspectives. Finally, nationalism will be defined as a rhetorical construct. This definition will be used for the remainder of the study.
Nationalism: A Discursive Construct

Many historians and political scientists have attempted to define the phenomena of nationalism with limited success. For example, in his seminal work, *Nationalism: Myth and Reality*, Boyd Shafer claims that "A century of study of the group loyalty that has powerfully motivated men in our time, nationalism, has produced no precise and acceptable definition." Indeed, "Many French, British, German, Italian, Russian, and American students have tried their hand with varying but never complete success." In the *Meaning of Nationalism*, Louis Snyder points out that the definition of nationalism hinges on relativity: "Nationalism may mean whatever a given people, on the basis on their historical experience, decide it to mean."

The term 'nation' also tends to be definitionally confusing. For instance, three approaches have been used to decipher the term. First, E. J. Hobsbawn claims that the "equation, nation = state = people, and especially sovereign people, undoubtedly linked nation to territory, since structure and definition of states were non territorial". Therefore, according to Hobsbawn, 'nation' and 'state,' seemingly, mean the same thing. Second, Shafer's method of analysis of 'nation' breaks down into three fundamental components:

1. a definite state which in early modern times has been democratic or dictatorial,
2. a definite territory though it has varied in size and seldom
has been considered large enough, (3) a group of people who possess a common culture--language, literature, history, and a common hope to live together in the future.¹⁹

Finally, Snyder emphasizes the root meaning of 'nation:'
"Derived from the Latin natio, the basic term would seem to indicate a people related by birth, and the quality of innateness would seem to be vital in its meaning."²⁰

Regardless of the definitional problems of nationalism, many scholars have attempted to pinpoint its qualities.²¹

Kenneth Minogue defines nationalism "to be a love for an abstraction of the nation, and that abstraction may have none but the most tenuous connection with the concrete national life."²² Hans Kahn describes nationalism as "a state of mind in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state."²³ Also, Snyder constructed a similar but more explicit meaning:

a condition of mind, feeling, or sentiment of a group of people living in a well-defined geographical area, speaking a common language, possessing a literature in which the aspirations of the nation have been expressed, attached to common traditions and common customs, venerating its own heroes, and, in some cases, having a common religion.²⁴

Furthermore, the esteemed historian, Carlton Hayes explained that according to the dicta of nationalism,

each nationality should constitute a united independent sovereign state, and that every national state should expect and require of its citizens not only unquestioning obedience and supreme loyalty, not only as exclusive patriotism, but also an unshakable faith in this surpassing excellence over all other nationalities and lofty
pride in its peculiarities and its destiny. This is nationalism and it is a modern phenomenon.  

Karl Deutsch breaks down nationalism into three fundamental components: communication, culture, and nationality. First, he argues that "larger group of persons linked by such complementary habits and facilities of communication [learned memories, symbols, and habits] we may call a people." Next, he contends, when forming a culture, "a people forms a social, economic, and political alignment of individuals from different social classes and occupations, around a center and a leading group." Finally, the culture struggles politically and socially to form a nationality:

an alignment of large numbers of individuals from the middle and lower classes linked to regional centers and leading social groups by channels of social communication and economic intercourse, both indirectly from link to link and directly with the center.  

For students of history and political science, the definition of nationalism often remains ambiguous. The above discussed definitions provide excellent interpretations. However, a multi-disciplinary approach may provide alternative interpretations. By examining nationalism as a discursive construct—a product of communication—rather, than treating it exclusively as a phenomenon for historians and political scientists, a better understanding of nationalism might be achieved.
Nationalism is a political movement foundationalized on communication. As previously discussed, Deutsch recognized that language and communication serve as the rudimentary forces of nationalism. Furthermore, Hayes places language as the "first and foremost" character of the components of nationalism. Rhetorical theory is useful for understanding the communicative inventional process of nationalism. The idea of nationalism is realized through the hermeneutic. Gadamer contends that language actualizes the hermeneutic. He asserts that "from language as a medium . . . our whole experience of the world, and especially the hermeneutic experience unfolds." The experience derived from the hermeneutic gives humans a sense of their relevance in the world:

The significance of the hermeneutical experience is rather that, in contrast to all other experience of the world, language opens up a completely new dimension, the profound dimension from which tradition comes down to those now living. This has always been the true essence of the hearing, even before the invention of writing: that the hearer can listen to the legends, the myths, and the truths of the ancients.

The experiential mode of the hermeneutic allows human beings to enter the web of tradition. Consequently, tradition invokes a significance of life for the hermeneutical participant by interacting with history.

The point of view, advocated by Gadamer, echoes the arguments of the founder of Conservatism, Edmund Burke. Burke's organic conception of history suggests that
tradition governs the actions of the present and the future generations. The renunciation of the past, both men seemingly argue, destroys the relevance of the present and the dreams of the future. Tradition, in this light, becomes a point of reference and authority. The hermeneutic creates an identity that is foundationalized on the recognized tradition of the past and forges a purpose for the future.

Through the authoritarian hermeneutic, the vision of nationalism arises. Dieter Misgeld discusses the significance of the hermeneutic authority to existence:

Traditions, customs, and mores manifest their superiority over our existence that they be redesigned in an unobtrusive fashion. Their authority asserts itself rather like the authority of an expert when consulted.

The institutionalized vision of nationalism mobilizes followers to congregate around the message of the hermeneutic that serves as a guide and referent for the legitimation of future actions.

The communal sharing of the doctrine of the hermeneutic is articulated by communication. As a result, the idea of nationalism is actualized through discourse. According to Andrew King, this discourse, mobilizational rhetoric, breaks down into two fundamental components: episodic and systemic mobilization. Episodic mobilization "characterizes the passing victories of a dynamic, relatively open, mass society." The leaders of the society "seek out and employ the beliefs of the masses, current cultural obsessions, and
time honored slogans and shibboleths in buttressing their appeals. . . ."³⁵

The mass appeal of episodic rhetoric strives to mobilize the followers by appealing to the accepted traditions, myths, and enthymemes. These appeal to the universal conscious of the followers:

The universality which rhetoric envisions is not that of subsumption in an analytic judgement, but rather a universality that arises dialectically, in discourse, where the conclusion is reached by elevating contrary opinions to the common middle through the enthymeme³⁸

Ernest Borman claims that "'persuasive' communication simply repeats what the audience already knows."³⁷ The cogent power of the discourse is that it creates a constituency by speaking accepted 'truths,' through the enthymeme.

Systemic rhetoric serves as the second component of mobilizational communication. King argues that systemic mobilization "differs from episodic mobilization as absolutist ideology differs from opportunistic arguments."³⁸ This discourse, according to King, not only builds upon experiences and ideas already present within a constituency, it also seeks to define the terms of public reality, to create new opinion, new consciousness, and a new way of perceiving experience.³⁹

Although different, the long-range goal of systemic rhetoric is inextricably bound to the ideas promulgated by episodic rhetoric. Systemic rhetoric co-opts the opportunistic arguments of episodic rhetoric and constructs
the hermeneutic: a new vision, a world view or an ideology.
The visionary discourse of mobilizational communication articulates the communal goal that the hermeneutically active must reach.

The power of hermeneutical discourse is its immunity from questions. The hermeneutic, or ideology of nationalism, exists as a discursive construct that provides an absolute understanding of the world. Recycled themes sustain the means of interpretation of the world for the nationalist.

In his book, *Faces of Nationalism: New Realities and Old Myths*, Schafer isolates these themes:

1) The people believe the land belongs to them (or should belong) to them, think of it as their own, and in diverse ways love it and oppose any diminution of its size.
2) The common culture generally includes language . . . or commonly understood languages . . . and common literature, common symbols, common customs, and common manners.
3) Some dominant social . . . and economic . . . institutions [exist].
4) [There is] A common independent or sovereign state . . . or . . . , the desire for one . . . .
5) [The people] have a shared belief in a common history and often in a common ethnic origin, sometimes thought to be religious or racial . . . .
6) [Followers have] Preference and esteem for fellow nationals . . . , those who share the common culture, institutions, interests, and heritage . . . .
7) [The people have] A shared, a common pride . . . in the past and present achievements . . . and a common sorrow in its tragedies . . . .
8) [They have] A shared indifference or hostility to other (not all) people similarly organized in nations . . . especially if the other nations seem to threaten the national security and hopes, the nation's survival in the present and future.
9) [There is] A devotion to the entity (even if little comprehended) called the nation . . . .
10) [The adherents have] A shared hope that the
nation, as a group and the individuals belonging to it, will have a secure and happy future.⁴⁰

These themes when taken together may comprise the construct of nationalism. Arguably, nationalistic leaders use discourse that draws from these themes to provide followers a vision or hermeneutic to interpret the world. As such, the themes become the ontology of the nationalist movement.

This discursive construct of nationalism may be useful for redefining U.S. social movements as nationalistic movements. One such movement is the Nation of Islam. The following section will provide the background of this nationalist force.

The Nation of Islam: The Emergence of a Nation

Racial strife emerged as a major social phenomenon for the United States once again in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The Civil Rights Movement that occurred during the 1960s did not alleviate the many racial fissures. Questions had been left unanswered. The rifts that exist between the various ethnicities in the United States today carry the legacy of the rhetorical problem that existed years ago.

Ultimately, the societal disturbances today have similar origins that gave rise to the various social movements which were born in the 1960s. For example, angered mobs in Southern Los Angeles participated in civic violence, lootings and the destruction of properties in the
Spring of 1992. The impetus for the riots in Los Angeles was the acquittal of police officers who many felt used excessive force in the arrest of Rodney King. This instance was considered to be racially motivated.

One of the major political movements to emerge in reaction to racial inequality during the 1950s and 1960s was the Nation of Islam, also known as the Black Muslims. Their esteemed leader and prophet, Elijah Muhammad, shaped a formal religious cult which grew to enormous proportions during the 1950s and 1960s. The faction of black radicals strove to create a vision for the African Americans to overcome social injustices that existed in the United States. The Nation of Islam sought "to resolve their fundamental problem of identity and to provide a context for their moral, cultural, and material advancement with the limits set by the American scene."  

The vision of the movement suggested a rhetorical dilemma that also confronted the European nationalist movements. Peace was the discursive vision for the followers of the Nation of Islam. Whereas, potential confrontation, often the threat of violence to outsiders, seemed to be its strategy. Perhaps viewing the Nation of Islam as a nationalistic movement rather than as a social movement could resolve the paradox.

An African American vision is problematic, but nationalism as defined above offered a solution. First,
deprived of their past, the Africans existed as slaves, and then were treated as second class citizens. The piecemeal declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), which allegedly freed the Africans from bondage, did not grant them rights as full citizens of the United States. Likewise, Article XV of the Constitution (1870) guaranteed African Americans the right to vote, but carried little validity until the Voting Rights Bill was passed in 1965—nearly one hundred years later. Indeed, "Any interpretation of the Black Experience must take into account the frustrating denial of Blacks of even of the elementary rights of humanity and citizenship for more than 200 of their 300 years or so in this country."  

Second, the Africans were displaced from their origins, leaving their history in their homeland. Upon arrival in the Americas, the slaves and their descendants were inoculated with the history and traditions of the Europeans.  

Education in schools negated the identity of the African American. Without a formal education that included the history of the African Americans, the identity of those people would begin to whither.  

Esteemed historian and sociologist, W. E. B. Du Bois, noted in 1897 that the African Americans' group life constituted a rejected society:  

First -- Negroes do not share the full national life because as a mass they have not reached a sufficiently high grade culture.
Second -- They do not share the full national life because there has always existed in America a conviction--varying in intensity, but always widespread--that people of Negro blood should not be admitted into the group life of the nation no matter what the condition might be.45

The character of the African American was left hermeneutically bankrupt. The ideas and history of the Europeans were forced upon them. Furthermore, the mandated denial of their cultural legacy left them without any relative type of unity or nation.

Denied the fundamental right of self-awareness, the African Americans sought for a means of unity. Nationalism, furnished by the Nation of Islam, provided that unity. Through solidarity, the African American could possibly achieve self-awareness, and become hermeneutically active. Contradicting the United States' 'melting pot' myth, the movement for unity brought about ethnic hostilities that still emerge as a threat to modern society.

In 1932, the Nation of Islam (The Lost Asiatic Tribe) began its slow and persistent appeal to African Americans. The ideological doctrine of the Muslamic theology, embraced by the Nation of Islam, at one point, claimed nearly half a million followers.46 The separatist discourse and ideology of the Black Muslims provided a viable alternative to the African American.

Its allure for the black community in the United States centered around the ideology of nationalism. Even though the doctrine of nationalism has mostly been a concern of the
European nations, it has existed strongly in the United States through the Black Muslims. Indeed, "The Black Muslims have made a science of black nationalism." ⁴⁷

A fundamental theme that drove the Nation of Islam was the appeal to authority. Muhammad served as the pinnacle of authority for the Nation of Islam during the 1950s and 1960s. His authority remained unquestioned until a political and theological rift occurred between him and Malcolm X from 1962 to 1965. ⁴⁸

The discourse of Muhammad resonated the nationalistic themes advanced by Hayes. For instance, Muhammad argued that the only way the African American could absolutely achieve self-improvement was to completely separate him/herself from the United States by establishing an autonomous nation-state. Allegedly, the Nation of Islam could legitimately prosper by creating a political entity that governed through self-rule. Annually, the Nation of Islam submits a petition to the United States Federal Government demanding the right to secede from the United States. Point Four from that document reads:

We want our people in America whose parents or grandparents were descendants from slaves, to be allowed to establish a separate state or territory of their own, either on this continent or elsewhere. We believe that our former slave masters are obligated to maintain and supply our needs in this separate territory for the next 20 or 25 years - until we are able to produce and supply our needs. . . . We believe that our contributions to this land and the suffering forced on us by the white American justifies our
demand for complete separation in a state or territory of our own.

The Black Muslims had never explicitly indicated the acceptable location for the desired separate nation-state, but the Southwest was featured as a prominent location. Before his break with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X felt that "nine or ten states would be enough."

The Nation of Islam provided a hermeneutic for many African Americans. Its doctrine attempted to proselytize thousands of African Americans. Authoritative discourse substantiated the ideology of the Nation of Islam. The next chapter will present a model for the analysis of the discourse of that ideology. The inventional process will be deconstructed in to provide a better understanding of this ideology.
NOTES


For more readings concerning the Risorgimento see:


"German Minorities Say Asylum Plan Won't End Terror,"


19 Shafer, _Nationalism: Myth and Reality_ 61.

20 Snyder, _The Meaning of Nationalism_ 9.


24 Snyder, The Meaning of Nationalism 196-197.


27 Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication 75.

28 Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication 75.


31 Gadamer, Truth and Method 462-463.


34 Andrew King, Power and Communication (Prospect Heights: Waveland, 1987) 41.

35 King, Power 41.


38 King, Power 43.

39 King, Power 42.


46 *Herald Dispatch* (Los Angeles), 28 May 1959: 1, 4.

47 Lincoln, *The Black Muslims* 34.


50 Lincoln, *The Black Muslims* 95.
In his essay, "Of Custome and Education," Francis Bacon noted that individual human expressions are governed by instilled opinions and customs. The indoctrination of opinions occurs through the institution of authority. The institutionalized discursive control manifesting in ideologies formalizes order and coherence over the world. Ideology is a hermeneutic of tradition.

The hermeneutic of tradition is a means for, and the preservation of, indoctrination. First, it exists as an heuristic interpretive framework. Ontologically, the discourse provides an encompassing world view for its adherents. Existence is understandable through the hermeneutic. Second, the hermeneutic legitimates agents of that tradition. Sanctioned individual(s), those who control the discourse, provide interpretations of events. These interpretations recycle authority within the hermeneutic. As such, the danger of an ideology is that the hermeneutic of tradition obscures an individual's understanding of the originating experience of fact.
This chapter argues that individuals can overcome the immanent dangers of ideologies, perhaps promoting civic harmony, by self-reflection. The act of self-reflection is a type of critique. The critic should analyze the discourse of the hermeneutic. In doing so, the imperfections of the message(s) could be exposed. Revealing the imperfections of an ideology is the first step to the liberation of the individual and society.

Chapter III attempts to deconstruct the ideology of the Nation of Islam through the means of the proposed model of self-reflection: Rhetoric as Praxis. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first section provides a basic description of the model. The second part operationalizes the model in the context of the Nation of Islam. First, the dynamics of the opinion leaders within the Nation of Islam will be discussed. Second, the section will suggest how these leaders constructed a hermeneutic of theocratic nationalism for their followers. Finally, Malcolm X's discourse will be examined as a personification of praxis.

The Model: Rhetoric as Praxis

Gadamer asserts that the hermeneutic of tradition constructs the ontological significance of humans as social animals, which is realized through the historicity of discourse. History provides the foundation for present and future recontextualizations of fact. Microscopically, 'fact' is a phenomenon, naturally verified through an
individual's senses. For instance, if a child comes in contact with fire, s/he sees the orange-red glow, hears the crackle of the materials being consumed, smells that object, and feels the heat. From these four senses, the child knows the reality--the fact--of that particular fire.

Historicizing opinion from fact supplies a coping mechanism for present and future by providing a context. As C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards argue "when a context has affected us in the past, the recurrence of merely a part of the context will cause us to react in the way in which we reacted before." In the example above, the fire's existence is opinion neutral. But, if the individual happened to have had a negative experience, i.e., was burned, s/he may draw cognitively from the information and abstract an opinion of the fire. In this case, s/he recalls that event not as its original existence, a mad dance of electrons (fact). S/he forms an opinion: filtering through his/her qualitative laden interpretative framework of pain, s/he assesses the badness of the event. An opinion is derived: "Fire is bad!" The referent for that particular fire is subsumed within the 'badness-of-fire' opinion. The opinion serves as a means of interpretation for future fire events. These, although not necessarily true fire events, suggest the sight, touch, smell, and/or hearing of the broader context and are recontextualized to elicit the response from the originating stimuli.
Macroscopically, historicizing recontextualizes societal events in much the same way. However, legitimated authority subsumes the fact and discursively constructs an opinion. Microscopically, knowledge and understanding of the world includes self-experiences and face-to-face interactions with other individuals. In the previous example, s/he assumed the level of expert for the particular fire event. This individual experienced the fire.

For the most part, first hand experience does not occur at the societal level where reality is filtered through opinion leaders. For instance, in Communist regimes, the Party borrowed positions argued by Karl Marx. Party leaders constructed a reality in which the proletariat was subjected to the tyranny of the bourgeoisie. Workers, members of the proletariat, did not have to experience the injustice committed by the bourgeoisie. Individuals were told and accepted the Party’s opinion.

Nimmo and Combs support this argument. The authors contend that our societal knowledge of the world is second hand, rather than being understood by first-hand experiences. The understanding of the political world is moderated through the means of mediation.

Few people learn about politics through direct experience; for most persons political realities are mediated through mass and group communication, a process resulting as much in the creation, transmission, and adoption of political fantasies as realistic views of what takes place.
Unable to transcend time and space, humans cannot experience every phenomena in the political and social world, so individuals depend on the interpretations of mediated realities to come to an understanding of the world. In turn, humans perceive the mediated evidence as a social fact.

People's daily lives consist of direct, firsthand experiences with events, places, other people, objects, and so on. But a lot of things happen with which people do not deal directly. They hear, read, or see pictures of these things, imagine what took place, give them meaning, and incorporate these indirectly experienced things into their pictures of the world, a second portion of their reality.5

No single mediated reality exists. The owners of the various medium all have different interpretations of a single fact. Hence, a plethora of understandings and mediated realities exist. Paul Watzlawick explains the impact of having various realities mediated to people:

[T]he most dangerous delusion of all is that there is only one reality. What there are, in fact, are so many different versions of reality; some of which are contradictory, but all of which are the results of communication and not reflections of eternal, objective truths.6

His argument suggests the existence of only one objective reality. However, that reality is unobtainable through various mediated realities, because of the opposing interpretations. In sum, Nimmo and Combs provide three conclusions with regards to reality:

(1) Our everyday, taken-for-granted reality is a delusion; (2) reality is created, or constructed, through communication not expressed by it; (3) for any situation there is no single reality, no
Mediated realities assume the level of fact and are constructed by the discourse of legitimated opinion leaders. The interpretive/historical context in the recontextualization of other events constructs a hermeneutic. The hermeneutic in the above microscopic example is that the individual perceives all fires are bad. The individual is constrained to the singular sensorial experience as well as to the qualitative interpretation. His/her fear obscures the sight, hearing, smell and touch of future fires. S/he approaches fire from the confining judgment of the first opinion: 'fire-is-bad.'

At the macroscopic level, constructed history serves as a means for societal interpretations. As stated in the example of the Communist Party, individuals did not have suffer at the hands of the bourgeoisie. The world provided them by the opinion leaders was heterogeneous. Utopia, or its promise, was within the Communist vision. The bourgeoisie, embodied as Capitalism, was blamed for all social injustice.

Opinions, such as the Communist doctrine, gain credence because of the perceived power of traditional authority. The opinion evolves, through discourse, into a hermeneutic, an ideology. Because of the inherent faith in tradition, individuals acknowledge the opinion of authority as being correct. Furthermore, acceptance of the ideology diffuses
discussion and participation, because the words of the opinion leaders have gained supremacy.

The hermeneutic at both the microscopic and macroscopic levels dooms the individual to neurosis. In the microscopic example, s/he cannot participate with the benefits of fire. Macroscopically, s/he cannot participate with societal reality. Possible advantages arriving from the debate between competing societal ideas are lost. In both instances, s/he confuses opinion with fact. All of the sensorial or societal experiences are abstracted to one thought.

To overcome these tendencies, self-reflection (praxis) must occur. S/he must critically examine the hermeneutic asking questions: Why is 'fire-is-bad.'?; or why is the Communist Party correct? This inquiry is deconstruction, whereby the individual attempts to discover the originating fact. Through this process, the person may realize that s/he has a personal/institutionalized reaction (hermeneutic) resulting from a personal/authoritarian judgment (opinion) that obscures the originating experience (fact). From the answers, posed by self-reflection, the person may come to realize that s/he is blinded (hermeneutic) to a thought (opinion) of one event (fact). The result of praxis is that s/he may empower him/herself to participate uniquely with other personal and societal events.

Through praxis as rhetoric individuals can question personal hermeneutics, and more importantly ideology,
manifest by authority. In doing so, humans may come closer to the original fact. Although individuals may approach the original fact, they will never be able to achieve absolute knowledge of the fact, because they are originally divorced from it by their personal historicity or that of opinion leaders. Nevertheless, through legitimate self-reflection, humans may come to a better understanding of the original fact and selves. The model is graphically shown below:

Fig. 1.

The next section will macroscopically operationalize the model by analyzing the discourse of the Nation of Islam.

Macroscopic Application

Applying the model macroscopically to the Nation of Islam begins with opinion. As discussed above, fact, in the social and political world, is mediated by opinion leaders. Opinion may be defined as the prejudice of authority.

Gadamer claims that the Enlightenment forced a negative connotation upon prejudice. The objectivity of thought deriving from the Enlightenment, discounted prejudice as irrational relativism. However, Gadamer sees prejudice as a
positive concept. He defines prejudice as a "means of judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined."\(^8\)

The predispositional factor of prejudice constructs the bias for the individual. According to Gadamer, there seem to be legitimate prejudices.

> If we want to do justice to man's finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices.\(^9\)

He sees prejudices inextricably bound to authority. Furthermore, the wisdom of authority's prejudice supercedes the individual's rationale and may reveal truth.

> If the prestige of authority displaces one's own judgement, then authority is in fact a source of prejudices. . . . Thus, acknowledging authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true.\(^10\)

Because of the position of authority, humans tend to accept that opinion. Thus, authority assumes the role of the decision maker because of its presumed superiority over the individual.

Submission of an individual's thought to the opinion of authority has been an area addressed by scholars since antiquity. Plato argued in *The Republic*, that the common person was unable to think and govern him/herself. The wisdom of the Philosopher King(s) served as the unquestionable governing voice.\(^11\) Centuries later
Machiavelli argued in *The Prince* that society is broken down into two components: nobility and people. The authority figure should have complete control over the people "[f]or throughout the whole country he alone is recognized as being entitled to allegiance." The monarch, according to Thomas Hobbes embodies all the power of the commonwealth. The will of the monarch becomes the will of the governed.

One Person, of whose Acts a great Multitude, by mutuall Covenants with one another, have made themselves every one the Author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their Peace and Common Defense.

Authority is a type of elitism. As discussed above, philosophers have examined the dynamics of authority and elites. Theories of elites continue to be discussed by modern scholars. C. Wright Mills sees authority and opinion leaders as the 'power elite.' He defines the power elite as men whose position enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences. Whether they do or do not make such decisions is less important than the fact that they do occupy such pivotal positions.

The elites, according to Mills, sit atop the hierarchy and govern society through decision making. "They occupy the strategic command posts of the social structure, in which they are now centered the effective means of power." Geraint Perry sees the function of elites as providing form to the mass constituency. Without the leadership of the elites society has no order.
Only the elite in the command posts of the society gains an overall view. The perception of the mass is fragmented. It is unable to see even the purpose of its own activities since it does not see what part they play in the total structure. The mass is unable to act as a single unit only when it is integrated from outside by the elite.  

The decision making authority of opinion leaders links directly to the power of the hermeneutic. Gadamer claims that the hermeneutic legitimizes the power of opinion leaders. He claims that their authority embodies superior knowledge, and the populace must accept the ideas and opinions of authority.

Gadamer asserts that because of authority's superior knowledge, "[t]he prejudices that they implant are legitimated by the person who presents them." Gadamer goes on to say:

That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us--and not only what is clearly grounded--always has power over our attitudes and behavior.

Gadamer's position can be summarized as follows. First, authority has a better understanding of the world.
Second, their opinion of the world is more valid because of their greater knowledge. Third, their opinion instills prejudices into the hermeneutically active. Finally, the opinion and authority are legitimated by mass acceptance of the inculcated opinion.

Even though Gadamer claims that people should not blindly submit to authority, the nature of the hermeneutic tends to define a passive audience that is unable to transcend the hermeneutic and has no alternative but to accept the opinion of the leaders. Gadamer argues that "[w]hile under the persuasive spell of a speech the listener for the moment cannot and ought not to indulge in critical examination." It is the function of authority to think for the masses: "Authority, however, is responsible for one's not using one's own reason at all."

For the opinion of authority to be legitimate, the audience cannot question the foundations of the opinion. Participation, in Gadamarian terms, means to acknowledge the authoritarian opinion. Allen Scult posits:

> The interpreter's audience participates in the creation of the understanding when it receives the interpretation but does not affect the interpreter's construction of the interpretation it receives."

Seemingly, the involvement by the audience is negligible to the point of passivity. The discursive opinion of authority stands as the final word. Questioning the supreme will of authority leads to chastisement.
The Nation of Islam formed coherence through unquestionable authority. Essien-Udom describes the dynamics of authority within the Nation of Islam.

Authority in the Nation of Islam matters of ideology, theology, and policy resides solely in the Messenger of Allah. He is the only leader of the Nation. Ministers and other officers perform leadership functions, although they deny that they are leaders. Their authority comes from Muhammad, hence they must be respected and obeyed by the followers.24

The hierarchical power of the Nation of Islam began with Elijah Muhammad. He "is the later day equivalent of an all-powerful theocratic ruler. He heads, by divine right, with absolute authority, the counterpart of a church-state."25 As the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad's power was revered by the members of the Nation of Islam.26 His absolute stature among the nation allowed him to hold within his hands supreme power.

Muhammad is known not only as "Messenger" and "Prophet" but also the "Spiritual Head of the Muslims in the West," "Divine Leader" and the "Reformer." His ministers most often refer to him as "The Honorable Elijah Muhammad" or as "The Messenger of Allah to the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of North America."27

Not only did he dictate by the consent of the Nation of Islam, but he personally considered himself to be the fountainhead of authority. He proclaimed that his personal relationship with Allah guaranteed his authority.

I am not trembling. I am the man, I am the Messenger. . . . I came directly from God. I am guided by God. I am in communication with God, and I know God. If God is not with me . . .
protecting me, how can I come and say things no other man has said and get away with it?²⁸

His Hobbesian stature of legitimated authority, predicated on the will of Allah, constructed an absolute theocratic power. To question the words of Muhammad, not only challenged a man, but attacked the religion. Such heresy would lead inevitably to ex-communication.

The ministers, who were appointed by Muhammad himself, served directly below Muhammad. These people espoused the doctrine promulgated by Muhammad. Their power centered around the leader’s teachings and his public pronouncements concerning the ideas of the Nation of Islam. Statements from the ministers only could be superceded by Muhammad.

The ideas of the Nation of Islam were unquestionable because of the perceived supreme authority of first, Muhammad, and second, the ministers of the separate temples. Since their words were allegedly guided by the will of Allah, the ideology or hermeneutic remained steadfast.

Hermeneutical understanding, as that of the Nation of Islam, suggests a recycling of knowledge. Gadamer claims that "the hermeneutical rule that we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole."²⁹ In other words, to divorce the detail from the whole, or vice versa, negates any type of relevant understanding. Hermeneutics generates a circular perception of understanding.

The anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes actual understanding when the
Gadamer argues that the circle is not explicit in nature, it is neither subjective nor objective but characterizes understanding as the interplay between tradition and the interpreter. The anticipation or prejudice of meaning that regulates an understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity. It proceeds from the communal bond with tradition.

Tradition occurs through the constant process of education from the opinion leaders. Tradition and prejudices are not merely preconceptions into which individuals enter. Individuals produce and interact with tradition and prejudices to the extent that they understand and participate in the construction of tradition. Thus, the circle of understanding precipitates the ontological structure of understanding.³¹

The ontological act of understanding the world demands interaction with the world’s historical environment by the hermeneutically active. Terry Hoy suggests:

Understanding is a "fusion of horizons" in which every encounter with tradition takes place within historical consciousness, an experience of tension of the traditional text and the present.³²

The hermeneutical participant comes to a holistic understanding of various phenomena by reconstructing the past to recontextualize the present.³³
By participating with and constructing tradition, authority or the opinion leaders are legitimated. The tacit approval by the hermeneutically active of "making the text speak" perpetuates the power. Gadamer claims that "the meaning of 'belonging'--i.e., the element of tradition in our historical hermeneutical activity--is fulfilled in the commonality of fundamental, enabling prejudices."^{34}

Acceptance of opinion seems to purport a powerful communal understanding. This type of understanding "can be something like an event, the unexpected and not planned for, the recognition of a truth, which has overpowering reality for us."^{35} Indeed, "The task of hermeneutics is to clarify this miracle of understanding, which is not a mysterious communion of souls, but a sharing of common meaning."^{36}

To explain the hermeneutical situation of textuality, Gadamer argues that "we found that this kind of undertaking, 'making the text speak', is not an arbitrary procedure that we undertake on our own initiative."^{37} Individuals are bound by expectations of the text through tradition.

According to Gadamer, humans exist as an integral factor of tradition: "... the questioner is part of the tradition and regards himself as addressed by it. This is the truth of historically effected consciousness."^{38} Moreover, "by renouncing the chimera of perfect
enlightenment, [the individual] is open to the experience of history."^{39}

In order for the "effective historical conscious" to be expressed, the meaning of the text must be translated into the language of the individual.\(^{40}\) First, language allows humans to be subsumed by the hermeneutic and to think hermeneutically. Because of discursive commitment to the hermeneutic, humans are unable to transcend it. Gadamer states:

To think historically means, in fact, to perform the transposition that the concepts of the past undergo when we try to think in them. To think historically always involves mediating between those ideas and one's own thinking. To try to escape one's own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible, but manifestly absurd. To interpret means precisely to bring one's own preconceptions into play so that the text's meaning can really be made to speak for us.\(^{41}\)

Second, acquiring the meaning of the text through interpretation "places the object . . . on the scale of words."\(^{42}\) The "interpretation in the medium of language itself shows what understanding always is: assimilating what is said to the point that it becomes one's own."\(^{43}\)

Subsequently, the absorption of the text by the hermeneutically active through language constructs a world view or ideology that is governed by traditional history. Leonard Hawes sees hermeneutical understanding as providing an apriori systems of forms characteristic of the communicative--not history as the study of disembodied old facts, but history as it is constituted "from" the present in and
Tradition is controlled by the legitimated opinion of authority. In order to perpetuate its existence, authority must discursively construct and sustain the hermeneutic.

Opinion leaders of the Nation of Islam were able to provide a hermeneutic of theocratic nationalism that was revered by the adherents through historicity. That history provided a coherent identity for the converts. First, the Nation of Islam constructed a new religio-tradition for African Americans. The creed consisted of three fundamental themes:

1. WE BELIEVE in the One God Whose proper Name is Allah.
2. WE BELIEVE in the Holy Qur-an in the Scriptures of all the Prophets of God.
3. WE BELIEVE in the truth of the Bible, but we believe that it has been tampered with and must be reinterpreted so that mankind will not be snared by the falsehoods that have been added to it.

The history did not deny assimilated religious beliefs but suggested that the Bible had been defaced by Caucasian. In order to exalt the identity of the African Americans and condemn the past of the Caucasians, the Nation of Islam constructed another history.

According to the history of the Nation of Islam, Allah created the supreme being—the black African. Lesser forms of humanity were created by Yacub, a great ancient scientist. Through genetic experimentation, Yacub discovered that mutations on the black gene could produce...
brown, yellow, red and white complexions. Yacub, whom the Bible refers to as Adam, intentionally created the white man or the 'white devil.' Once his scheme was discovered, he and his followers were cast out of Paradise (Asia) and sent to the caves of Europe. In the caves of Europe, the 'white devils' crawled on all fours, just as the beasts. According to the will of Allah, the 'white devils' would rule the world for six thousand years, until the Nation of Islam would rise in 1914.46

According to Black Muslims, the destiny and eschatology of the creed ensured the salvation of the converts.

[W]e are the people of God’s choice, as it has been written, that God will choose the rejected and despised. We can find no other persons fitting this description in these last days more than the so-called Negroes in America.47

Furthermore, the destruction of the white race, when the judgment of the world would come, was guaranteed by the creed.

The destruction of the present world will not mean the destruction of all mankind, but only the destruction of the devils (the Caucasians) and their religion (Christianity). It will be the judgement of Allah, which is amply revealed in the Book of Revelation as the War of Armageddon. . . . The destruction of the world will definitely occur some time before the year 2,000 A. D. and the year 1970 has been suggested by the Messenger, although the exact date is known only to Allah.48

Second, the Nation of Islam’s hermeneutic was a construction of a new secular history for the African American. As with the religious construction, this history did not deny the past but drew from it. According to the
Black Muslims, 'white' American history subjected the African to absolute misery. Malcolm X, as a devoted minister, claimed that "We [the Africans] didn't land on Plymouth Rock, my brothers and sisters--Plymouth Rock landed on us!" 49

The Nation of Islam claimed that history had been 'whitened.' The white hegemony monopolized the ideas of history. The deeds of the Africans had sometimes been purposely omitted from the pages of history.

I have often observed the sin of omission and commission on the part of the white authors . . . [who] studiously left out the many credible deeds of the Negro. The general tone of most of the histories taught in our schools has been that of inferiority of the Negro. 50

The Nation of Islam argued that the "black men had been 'brainwashed for hundreds of years.' Original Man was black, in the continent called Africa where the human race had emerged on the planet earth." 51

According to Charles Lincoln, the Nation of Islam's discursive construct seems to center around three factors: "a disparagement of the white man and his culture, a repudiation of the Negro identity and an appropriation of Asiatic culture symbols." 52 In other words, by co-opting the history of the Asiatic culture, the followers could discredit the achievements of the hegemony and elevate their own.
Because of the crimes of history against African Americans, the Nation of Islam claimed that African Americans were faced with despicable living conditions. Poverty, crime, drugs, and prostitution plagued many of the neighborhoods of the black communities. The hermeneutic of the Black Muslims defined these problems. The locus of blame for the plight of the African Americans was the 'white' experience. Rejected the accepted history of white Americans elevated the identity of the African Americans. Thus, the historical discourse of the Nation of Islam "employs the heritage of abuse and indignity to which the Negro people in the United States have been subjected and, perhaps more importantly, their common desire for self improvement."

To alleviate the suffering of African Americans, the Nation of Islam established a set of objectives. Muhammad proclaimed four ambitions for the Nation of Islam in the doctrine, "The Muslim Program: What We Want." These were freedom, justice, equality of opportunity, and a separate ethnic state. Combined, these objectives set an absolute goal that the Nation of Islam attempted to achieve. This absolutist position made the Nation of Islam a nation within a nation. Muhammad claimed:

We are a nation in a nation. . . . We want to build a nation that will be recognized as a nation, that will be self respecting and receive respect of the other nations of the earth. . . . We must understand the importance of land to our nation. The first and most important reason that
the individual countries of Europe, Africa and Asia are recognized as nations is because they occupy a specific area of the earth.59

The Nation of Islam foundationalized on the theocratic-secular nationalist tendencies, constructed a hermeneutic—a new world view or a new ideology. The ideology provided a sense of significance for African American in the world. According to the ideology of the Nation of Islam, the African Americans would no longer be demarcated from other societal participants. Indeed, a new society would be constructed to replace the old one. A nation-state for the Nation of Islam would guarantee legitimate civic participation.

However, by providing individual African Americans with a hermeneutic of the Nation of Islam that sought to replace the existing world view, the inevitable cycle of mediated distortion continued. Participation envisaged by the ideology gave only a perceived participation. Even though African Americans had the common experience of subjection, Black Muslimic reality was mediated by the opinion leaders of the Nation of Islam. The adherents of the ideology were not real participants, they were captives of a new ideology.

To overcome the limitations of an ideology, dominance of authority, and lack of participation, the individual must critique the ideology. Praxis critiques ideology. To demonstrate this assertion, the discussion turns to the role of praxis in deconstructing the hermeneutic of the Nation of Islam.
Praxis is an active function of critical theory. As such, praxis expresses a different end than that of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics perpetuates tradition. The ultimate goal of praxis is the liberation of the individual from tradition. Misgeld discusses the difference between critical theory and hermeneutics:

Critical theory is not hermeneutics: it aims at a critique of society and our history. It is oriented toward emancipation from our historical past, in so far as this history can be seen as a history of the exercise of domination and repression.\(^5^7\)

Liberation of the individual occurs because of self-reflection, a type of deconstruction. Catherine Belsey describes deconstruction as

the analysis of the process and conditions of its [text] construction out of the available discourses. . . . The object of deconstructing the text is to examine the process of its production—not the private experience of the individual author, but the mode of production, the materials and their arrangement in the work.\(^5^8\)

Praxis is the self-reflecting discursive deconstruction of the text. Habermas describes self-reflection as "at once intuition and emancipation, comprehension and liberation from dogmatic dependence."\(^5^9\) In its active process, the "act of self-reflection that 'changes a life' is a movement of emancipation."\(^6^0\) Praxis as rhetoric may be seen as movement arising from the critical art of discursive inquiry that allows the critic to transcend the hermeneutic of
tradition and construct an alternate interpretation of the original factual phenomenon.

By deconstructing a text the critic is empowered. If the hermeneutically active does not enter the mode of deconstruction (praxis), the individual relies on the answers espoused by the dogma sanctioned by authority and exists as a dogmatist. Habermas describes the dogmatist as one who

lives in dispersal as a dependent subject that is not only determined by objects but is itself made into a thing. He leads an unfree existence, because he does not become conscious of his self-reflecting self-activity.61

Self-reflection (praxis) allows the individual to discover alternate interpretations that may be opposed to the prevailing authoritarian dogmatism of the hermeneutic. Thus, the critic avoids dependence on the opinion of the author of the text. The individual moves to a more autonomous existence.

Emancipation may occur if a vocabulary of praxis exists. This vocabulary is required to question the validity of the hermeneutic leading to a better understanding of the original fact. Herbert Marcuse discusses the need for a new language and vocabulary to eradicate discursive domination:

The new sensibility and the new consciousness which are to project and guide such reconstruction demand a new language to define and communicate the new "values" (language in the wider sense which includes words, images, gestures, tones). It has been said that the degree to which a revolution is developing qualitatively different
social conditions and relationships may be perhaps be indicated by the development of a different language: the rupture with the continuum of domination must also be a rupture with the vocabulary of domination.62

Rhetoric as probability arguably serves as the means by which to question the absolutes of the hermeneutic. Through the use of this more legitimate vocabulary of rhetoric, the critic can discursively participate with history. In other words, by discursively interacting with the ideas of tradition, as opposed to blindly accepting them, the critic can become a constructor of his/her reality rather than being a victim of the hermeneutic.

Habermas describes this rhetoric of probability as a 'rationally motivated recognition.' His description can be used by the self-reflective participants as the new vocabulary for emancipation from ideologies. First, the validity claim of assertion must be the exclusive object of discussion. Second, the participant themes and contributions must not be restricted. Third, no force must be used except that of the better argument. Finally, all motives must be excluded except the cooperative search for truth.63

In sum the rhetoric of emancipation offers two ontological dimensions for the individual. The first is a rational dimension. The individual is freed from the ideology. The ideology no longer exists as a vanguard of interpretations but is revealed as an object of dominance.
Second, the rational dimension suggests an ethical domain. Exposing the ideology as an object of domination allows the individual the freedom to express his/her will. To recognize the ideology in its true appearance, distorted communication and the dominance of tradition, the individual achieves liberation and true participation.\textsuperscript{64}

The concept of an emancipated people is "as much an ethical as a rational; it is critical as well as descriptive and in this respect its historical and political telos is effectively utopian."\textsuperscript{65} Even though the end result may be utopian in nature, individuals, to achieve autonomy, should strive for such an existence. To do so would lead to a better self-understanding.

Malcolm X, as he attempted to assess the Nation of Islam, arguably personified praxis. Before leaving the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X, although a leader of the movement, was what Habermas describes as a dogmatist. Malcolm X asserted that his twelve year association with the hermeneutic was one "... of never thinking for as much as five minutes about myself ..."\textsuperscript{66} After leaving the organization, Malcolm X stated in a \textit{New York Times} article that:

\begin{quote}
I feel like a man who has been asleep somewhat and under someone else's control. I feel what I'm thinking and saying now is for myself. Before it was for and by the guidance of Elijah Muhammad. Now I think with my own mind ... \textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}
Malcolm X's movement toward the deconstruction of the Nation of Islam occurred because of his questioning the authoritative opinion of the hermeneutic. He asserted:

The thing that you have to understand about those of us in the Black Muslim movement was that all of us believed 100 per cent in the divinity of Elijah Muhammad. We believed in him. We actually believed that God, in Detroit by the way, that God had taught him and all of that. I always believed that he believed it himself. And I was shocked when I found out that he himself didn't believe it.⁶⁸

The conclusion he reached was that many individuals within the organization were not wrong. However, the fault of the nation was that the people were "being misled by the hierarchy."⁶⁹

This realization destroyed Malcolm X's world view. He described the event as one in which he "felt as though something in nature had failed, like the sun, or the stars. It was that incredible a phenomenon . . . something too stupendous to conceive."⁷⁰

Malcolm X overcame the ontological vacuum through praxis. As stated above, self-reflection (praxis) allows the individual to discover alternate interpretations that may be opposed to the prevailing authoritarian dogmatism of the hermeneutic. As Malcolm X argued,

And when that shock reached me, then I began to look everywhere else and try and get a better understanding of the things that confront all of
us so that we can get together in some kind of way to offset them.\textsuperscript{71}

This process developed along three lines. These included a "wider contact with white men who were not the 'devils' he had thought they were"; "a growing doubt about the authenticity of Elijah Muhammad's version of the Muslim religion--a doubt that grew into a certainty with more knowledge and more experience"; and, "a number of prolonged trips to Mecca . . . that . . . [led] to the conclusion that he had yet to discover Islam."\textsuperscript{72}

The three means provided him with a new inventive framework. First, he reassessed racial relationships.

I believe in recognizing every human being as a human being--neither white, black, brown or red; . . . I believe in a society in which people can live like human beings on the basis of equality.\textsuperscript{73}

He later concluded that "My friends today are black, brown, red, yellow, and white!"\textsuperscript{74}

Second, Malcolm X reappraised the Islamic religion. The religion he discovered was one separated from other religions only by language.

I am a Muslim and there is nothing wrong with being a Muslim, nothing wrong with the religion of Islam. It just teaches us to believe in Allah as the God. Those of you who are Christians probably believe in the same God, because I think you believe in the God who created the universe. That's the one we believe in, the one who created the universe--the one difference being you call him God and we call him Allah. The Jews calls him Jehovah. If you could understand Hebrew, you would probably call him Jehovah too. If you could understand Arabic, you would probably call him Allah.\textsuperscript{75}
Malcolm X would later concede that he was one "of the leaders in projecting the Muslim movement and causing so many people to believe in the distorted version of Islam . . . ."76

Finally, and not mutually exclusive from the other lines, were Malcolm X's pilgrimages to Mecca. These trips further called into question the authority of the Nation of Islam and its religio-racist tendency. Malcolm X noted that Elijah Muhammad had taught us that the white man could not enter into Mecca in Arabia and all of us who followed him, we believed it . . . . When I got over there and went to Mecca and saw these people who were blond and blue-eyed and pale-skinned and all those things, I said, "Well," but I watched them closely.77

He later observed:

Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and the overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this ancient holyland, the home of Abraham, Muhammad and all the other prophets of the Holy Scriptures. For the past week I have been utterly speechless and spellbound by the graciousness I see displayed all around me by people of all colors.78

These experiences equipped Malcolm X with a new vocabulary that enabled him "finally to muster the nerve, and the strength, to start facing the facts, to think for . . . [himself]."79 This self-reflection lead to a new inventional framework. First, he began to recognize that his ontological existence in the Nation of Islam was founded on someone other than himself.

I've had enough of someone else's propaganda . . . . I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I'm a human being first and foremost, and as such I'm
for whoever and whatever benefits humanity as a whole.\textsuperscript{80}

His more rational stance was "sitting down and analyzing the possibilities" before following the dictates of others.\textsuperscript{81}

Second, his discourse began to reflect the more ethical domain of rhetoric. He realized that an individual's free will serves as a fundamental element to a more ethical existence. He claimed that he began to respect "every man's right to believe whatever his intelligence tells him is intellectually sound, and I expect everyone else to respect my right to believe likewise."\textsuperscript{82}

In the past, I have permitted myself to be used to make sweeping indictments of all white people, and these generalizations have caused injuries to some white people who did not deserve them. Because of the spiritual rebirth which I was blessed to undergo as a result of my pilgrimage to the Holy City of Mecca, I no longer subscribe to sweeping indictments of one race.

In the future, I intend to be careful not to sentence anyone who has not been proven guilty. I am not a racist and do not subscribe to any of the tenets of racism. In all honesty and sincerity it can be stated that I wish nothing but freedom, justice and equality: life, liberty and pursuit of happiness--for all people.\textsuperscript{83}

Possibly because of this more rational and ethical approach to reality, he denied one of the major tenets of the Black Muslims--a separate black state. Instead, his vision was that of "a society in which people can live like human beings on the basis of equality." \textsuperscript{84}

Malcolm X presents a persona reflecting rhetoric as praxis. His ever changing discourse reveals critical
thinking. By entering the active mode of self-reflection, Malcolm X was able to transcend the hermeneutic of the Nation of Islam and search for the originating experience of fact. Questioning the legitimacy of the authority and opinion of Muhammad enabled him to construct his own opinion from his perceived facts. More importantly, Malcolm X assumed responsibility for those opinions. He argued that he and others should be accountable and not relinquish responsibility to the label of a group.

And I also don't believe that groups should refer to themselves as "leftists," "rightist," or "middle-ist." I think that they should just be whatever they are and don’t let people put labels on them—and don’t ever put them on yourself.

Because he was able to achieve autonomy, he moved closer to authentic participation emancipating himself from the hermeneutic.

This chapter has discussed the invention of hermeneutical discourse by analyzing the discourse of the Nation of Islam. Individuals are divorced from the originating experience of fact, by the recontextualization of hermeneutics. In the social and political world institutionalized authority interprets reality according to its will, and forms an opinion. The opinion, manifesting as a hermeneutic or ideology, provides the ontological significance of the adherents. The approval of authority and its opinion perpetuates the hermeneutical cycle and gives the hermeneutically active the illusion of
participation. Hierarchically, the opinion of authority is an object of domination because the individual becomes dependent on the hermeneutic. S/he does not construct reality, per se. S/he becomes a victim of authority's opinion.

This chapter proposes a model that deconstructs the hermeneutic of tradition through rhetoric. Deconstructing the hermeneutic empowers the individual to achieve liberation and autonomy from the hermeneutic of tradition. Autonomy yields an ethical and rational existence. Malcolm X seemed to reflect these aspects of deconstructive critical thinking. His critical inquiry of the Nation of Islam questioned the validity of the nation and its authority. The next chapter will discuss the ramifications of the study.
NOTES


7 Nimmo and Combs, *Political Mediated Realities* 3.


10 Gadamer, Truth 279-280.


17 Gadamer, Truth 279.

18 Gadamer, Truth 279.

19 Gadamer, Truth 280.

20 Gadamer, Truth 280.


22 Gadamer, Truth 277.


31 Gadamer, *Truth* 293.


40 Gadamer, Truth 396.
41 Gadamer, Truth 397.
42 Gadamer, Truth 398.
43 Gadamer, Truth 398.
48 Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism: A Search for 138-139.
50 Edward A. Johnson, A School History of the Negro Race in America (New York: Goldman Co., 1911) III.


56 Draper, *The Rediscovery* 80-81.


60 Habermas, *Knowledge* 212.

61 Habermas, *Knowledge* 208.


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CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes with a summary, discussion of the implications, and suggestions for future research. The first section summarizes the findings of the study that human beings are governed by hermeneutical discourse. The argument of the study claims that in order to achieve legitimate societal participation, humans must question the hermeneutic. The limitations of the study are suggested in the final section. Possible areas of research are described that could enhance the value of the proposed model.

Summary and Implications

The argument of the study stems from the theories of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jurgen Habermas. Gadamer asserts that the ontological significance of humans as social animals is realized through the historicity of discourse manifest in the hermeneutic of tradition. Historical discourse positions individuals in the broader context of society. Habermas, on the other hand, contends that the hermeneutic of tradition propagates the domination of individuals and society as a whole. According to Habermas, the individual's emancipatory interests naturally should drive the individual to question the hermeneutic through
self-reflection seeking a more autonomous position in society. This study proposes a model that synthesizes the positions of Gadamer and Habermas. In this study, the model was operationalized in the framework of nationalism. More explicitly, the model was used to deconstruct the hermeneutic of the Nation of Islam.

The fundamental implication of this study is that the discursive process of hermeneutics obscures the rhetorical tradition. The precept of traditional rhetoric asserts the denial of an absolute truth. George Kennedy claims that rhetoric is only "useful and legitimate" when more than one side is presented and "the choice between them can be clearly perceived and intelligently made."¹

Informed choice serves as a means to an end. The end, according to Ciceronian thought, is that individuals, after arriving at a probable truth, will be able to make informed decisions benefiting both the public and political spheres.

The hermeneutic harms this ideal. First hermeneutics supports the notion of an absolute truth. The hermeneutic is a hegemonic interpretation of reality that is a construction of a visionary world view. Its discursive tenets cannot be questioned.

Second, this ideological vision restrains the social and political participation of the hermeneutically active. The opinion leaders govern the ideology. The adherents tend to submit to the decisions of authority. John O'Neil states
that the "danger is that many people may be herded together in the interests of their political leaders who have community on their lips or in their plans but not in their hearts." The people are provided answers and have an excuse for their absence of legitimate participation.

This study argues for the pursuit of ethical existence and legitimate societal participation within the bounds of traditional rhetoric. These forms of civility are possible only when the individual questions the hermeneutic. First, the importance of critical thinking manifests when the individual becomes aware that his/her will is the sole object of submission. As Misgeld asserts:

Not all things, institutions, texts, or persons in the world can lay similar claim to our attention and there is no class of items in the world, be they institutions or not, which we can single out in advance as having of necessity the 'right' to expect the surrender of understanding and reflection. To surrender rather occurs in the process of understanding.  

Second, by exercising critical thought, the individual is able to challenge hegemonies. Habermas claims that the "order of authority is justified by falling back on traditional world-views and a conventional civic ethic." These legitimizing forces of tradition dissolve "when they are torn out of the interpretive systems that guarantee continuity and identity."

This study argues that praxis--the practice of critical thought and process of confronting institutionalized
authority through self-reflection—empowers the individual. The outcome is one whereby the individual achieves, at least, partial emancipation from the domination of tradition. His/her rational choice and authentic participation in decision making assume more significance for the individual.

While this study provides a means for deconstructing hermeneutics, future research could benefit its application. Such studies would make the model more comprehensive for analyzing human discourse. These areas are suggested in the next section.

Suggestions for Future Research

Admittedly, this method of discourse analysis has limitations that need to be addressed to test the further usefulness of the model. First, only one phenomenon is addressed by the study. The model is operationalized by analyzing the discourse of the Nation of Islam. The model needs to be tested in other arenas of inquiry. Second, the foundation of the model possibly parallels other fields of scholarly inquiry. Integrating these related areas into the model could reveal a more thorough explanation of human discourse.

To address the first issue, other historical ideologies could be used to test the model. One area suggested in Chapter II is the growth of European nationalism. For instance, the discourse promulgated by the leaders of the French Revolution could be examined, i.e. Robespierre.
Also, the discourse of Giuseppe Mazzini, who led the Young Italy nationalist movement could be analyzed. Both areas of inquiry could provide pertinent insights into the development of the ideology or hermeneutic of nation-state nationalism.

Areas of inquiry are not limited to the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Twentieth century ideologies are useful subjects of inquiry, as well. For example, the discourse of the ideology of environmentalism could be explored. Comparing the conflicting hermeneutic of the environmentalists to that of the industrialists could test the arguments of the model.

Besides enhancing the applicability of the model by additional case studies, its theoretical foundation could be expanded by integrating the contributions of other scholars. The proposed model, as stated above, draws primarily from Gadamer and Habermas. Other theoretical perspectives could strengthen the validity of the model.

For instance, Gadamer and Habermas recognize the significance of the individual as an autonomous being, but this is not solely a twentieth century perspective. The Humanist tradition of the sixteenth century seemingly advocated parallel ideas. The fundamental "reason for Humanist activity was a passionate concern with the human condition, a passionate dedication to the improvement of human life and to the emancipation of human life." A
broader appreciation and relevance for Humanism may be possible by reconciling that tradition with the one posed by the model.

The results from these studies may eventually instill within the individual that s/he can become a more authentic societal member. By questioning the ideologies and the authority of those hermeneutics, individuals may come closer to the original fact. In doing so, s/he may achieve the high status of a critical thinker. An individual's dependence on his/her own rationale expands participation, rather than subservience to the dictates of an ideology that stifles participation.

This chapter has argued that for society to ethically exist the inherent power structure of the hermeneutic must be questioned. Challenging the hermeneutic with legitimate discourse--rhetoric as praxis--individuals and society may cast aside the dominating yoke of tradition, thus leading to a more humane society of true participants.

This chapter also has suggested areas of research that may test and strengthen the application of this model. The results of these investigations may uncover recurring imperfections of hermeneutical discourse. These observations may facilitate a better understanding of hermeneutic constructions. Through continuing research of this nature, ethical and legitimate discourse may become more apparent to societal members.
NOTES


5 Habermas, *Legitimation* 71.

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