A Philosophical Hermeneutic Study of the Interview between Minister Louis Farrakhan and Imam W. Deen Mohammed: Toward a Fusion of Horizons

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Abstract

The philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer has broadened the scope and manner of hermeneutic inquiry. By focusing on aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics such as dialogue, the hermeneutic circle, play, openness, and the fusion of horizons, this study sought to apply Gadamer's ideas to an historic interview that took place between two notable Islamic leaders, Minister Louis Farrakhan and Imam Warith Deen Mohammed. By analyzing the dialogue of the interview and identifying the relevant Gadamerian concepts at play within the exchanges, it was determined that a fusion of horizons did in fact occur. By applying philosophical hermeneutics to a real world dialogic encounter with participants who harbored deep-seated, divergent views, the current study accentuates the use of philosophical hermeneutics as an analytic framework. This study also highlights the utility of using philosophical hermeneutics in inter and intra-faith dialogue specifically, and in the quest for understanding in general.

Keywords

Hans-Georg Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics, fusion of horizons, interfaith dialogue, Nation of Islam

While early attempts to establish Islam in America were made by individuals such as Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb and the Ahmadiyyas from India, the rise of Islam in America, in large numbers, can be traced to two early movements centered in Black, inner city

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enclaves (Berg, 2009). The first of these two movements, the Moorish Science Temple, gained adherents during the 1920s in Newark, New Jersey. The second, more impactful movement, was the Nation of Islam (NOI) founded in Detroit, Michigan in 1930.

During its nearly 90-year history, the Nation of Islam has produced a number of iconic, if not controversial, personalities including Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali. Two other globally recognized leaders emanating from the NOI are Minister Louis Farrakhan and Imam Warith Deen Mohammed. While Minister Farrakhan and Imam Mohammed had both been influential ministers within the ranks of the NOI, dynamics within the organization would ultimately drive a wedge between them. After their split, the adversarial Islamic organizations subsequently headed by the two men would oscillate between cordial and contentious relations for nearly 25 years. The historic interview under investigation in this study represents the first time the two leaders have publicly reunited since their split in 1977.

These two men, and their respective organizations, have particular relevance in the life of the author. My earliest recollections from childhood are fond memories of my experiences in a NOI daycare in Kansas City, Missouri during the 1970s. By this time, leadership of the NOI had passed from The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, patriarch of the NOI, to his son, Imam Mohammed (then named Wallace Muhammad). My parents, who were not Muslim, enrolled my sister and I in the daycare because of the strong reputation that the NOI had in the community. Once my sister and I started grade school however, we were enrolled in the public-school system. Ironically, some 12 years later, Minister Louis Farrakhan would be thrust into my life. As a child of the 1980s, much of my adolescence was spent listening to Hip Hop music. During "The Golden Age" of Hip Hop (a period roughly spanning the mid 1980s to the early 1990s) many of the top rap artists infused their songs with audio samples of Minister Farrakhan's speeches and their lyrics with references to the teachings of the NOI. These references piqued my interest in the man and his organization and, after some time, I joined the ranks of the NOI in my early twenties.

My time in the NOI acquainted me with an insider's view of the teachings and the history of the organization. It additionally gave me an indepth understanding of the issues surrounding the split between Minister Farrakhan and Imam Mohammed. I respected the Imam because he was a gifted son of The Honorable Elijah Muhammad. I was indebted to Minister Farrakhan because his teachings changed the direction of my life. During my time in the NOI, the coming together of these two Islamic leaders was often discussed, though it seemed a near impossibility. But, in many ways, that is why this interview is so historic. For me, this interview not only represents a reconnection between two men, two organizations and two theological doctrines, it also represents a reconnection with the early and later influences in my own life.

Purpose of the Study

My purpose in this present study is to analyze a moderated discussion between two religious leaders. The contentious history of the leaders, the divergent paths of their respective religious groups, and the polarizing nature of the subject matter makes their historic conversation suitable for applying Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics of understanding. Principles and concepts relevant to Gadamer's approach will be examined with an emphasis on his notion of the fusion of

horizons. The background of the participants in the interview and the nature of their theological disagreement will be explored. From there, portions of the dialogue between the participants will be analyzed through the lens of Gadamer's concepts. Last, a determination will be made as to whether a fusion of horizons was achieved. By analyzing this interview, it is my intent to highlight the value of Gadamer's approach as a hermeneutic tool as well as to shed light on its utility when applied to a real-world, dialogic encounter.

Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, developed a version of hermeneutics aimed at determining how we achieve "understanding." Gadamer called his approach philosophical hermeneutics (PH). In discussing PH, it is helpful to begin by pointing out what PH is not. Unlike classical hermeneutics where a toolkit of methods is used in order to mine and extract interpretable information from a text, PH is not a method at all. In differentiating Gadamer's approach from the rigid and mechanical approach of traditional hermeneutics, Gill (2015) noted that hermeneutics "is a human's mode of being-in-the-world" (p. 11). Rather than engaging in interpretation through the systematic, methodical investigation of a text, Gadamer suggested that, our "be-ing," as we navigate in and make sense of the world, necessitates an ongoing, perpetual process of interpretation. In our daily existence, the people, places, and things that we encounter represent an "other." By actively engaging with these "others" (and their active engagement with us), we diligently strive to create a shared opportunity for knowledge acquisition and the expansion of insight. This, in turn, leads us to a greater understanding of the "other" and of ourselves.

Conceptualized in this way, Gadamer sees understanding as "more of an event than a procedure" (Grondin, 2009, p. 407). In every situation in which we seek to understand an "other," we bring critical components that lead to these "events of understanding." These components, our prejudices, our fore-knowledge from previous experiences, the traditions of our environments, and the histories of our micro and macro worlds, are the building blocks we innately bring to every encounter. Taken together, these components are in fact the antecedents to understanding. As Moules, McCaffrey, Field, and Laing (2015) wrote:

> Understanding is always about something that is already there, which means we can never start as if with a blank slate…We never approach a text, experience, or topic as a completely blank slate - we already have a fabric of meaning into which we accommodate, with more or less difficulty, the next new event…Interpretation happens in dialogue and it is our prior commitments that give us something to say in dialogue with new experience. (p. 43)

This intrinsic wealth of knowledge we bring to every encounter, these "prior commitments," represent our horizon. Through our horizon we see, interpret, interact, and understand the world. At any given moment, our horizon manifests as the vantage point from which we see and interpret the world. In conversations, horizons are instrumental because, as Vesey (2009) noted, they

provide perspective by being the implicit and explicit beliefs that furnish the context for understanding a sentence; they establish what is significant for understanding…and what is insignificant...Horizons mark the limits of our understanding as our background beliefs affect what sentences we understand and how we understand them. (p. 537)

It is the interplay of our horizon in conversation with the horizon of an "other" that facilitates the potentiality for understanding. This dialogically derived understanding between interlocutors is what Gadamer called the fusion of horizons. It is my aim in this study to determine if a fusion of horizons occurred between Minister Louis Farrakhan and Imam Warith Deen Mohammed during their historic interview.

Background to the Interview

The Nation of Islam

The disconnect between Minister Farrakhan and Imam Mohammed has its roots in the religious organization known as the Nation of Islam. Founded on July 4, 1930, by an enigmatic and mysterious figure named Fard Muhammad, the NOI preached a doctrine of moral uprightness, religious devotion, economic independence, self-determination, and an esoteric version of Islam that was a departure from Islam as preached and practiced throughout the orthodox Muslim world (Lincoln, 1994). The doctrine of the NOI was also known for promoting highly racialized teachings such as references to Whites as "devils" and Blacks as "Gods," a call for the separation of Blacks into their own land, and the identification of "Yacub" as the progenitor of the White race (Muhammad, 1965).

Upon the sudden departure of Fard Muhammad in 1934, leadership of the NOI was bequeathed to Elijah Muhammad. Prior to his departure, Fard Muhammad had groomed Elijah to be his successor. After assuming leadership of the NOI, Elijah Muhammad began professing that Fard Muhammad (now referred to as Master Fard Muhammad) was in reality Allah/God in person. This controversial, anthropomorphic doctrine was the bedrock of the NOI during Elijah Muhammad's leadership from 1934 to his passing in 1975.

Farrakhan and Mohammed: The Parting of Ways

Upon the passing of his father in 1975, Wallace Muhammad (Imam Mohammed) assumed leadership of the NOI. The popularity of Minister Farrakhan within the NOI, as well as his beloved status in the eyes of Elijah Muhammad, led most observers to believe that Farrakhan would be the logical heir to NOI leadership after Elijah Muhammad's passing. However, in a show of deference, Farrakhan conceded leadership of the NOI to Wallace and a power struggle was averted (Gardell, 1996). Not long after taking over, Wallace began drastically changing the teachings and the structure that had been the foundation of his father's NOI. Specifically, Wallace sold off much of the properties and assets held by the NOI, he relaxed the strict dress code and social habits of the organization, and, most notably, renounced the NOI's racialized teachings and the deification of Master Fard Muhammad (Lincoln, 1994). Ultimately, Wallace changed his name to Warith Deen Mohammed, he changed the name of the organization, and he

completely transitioned the religious teachings and practices of the group into unison with those of the orthodox Islamic world (Gardell, 1996).

Farrakhan, after initially going along with the drastic changes implemented by Imam Mohammed, eventually became discontented. Believing that Imam Mohammed was distorting the legacy and teachings of Elijah Muhammad, and no longer willing to accept this new direction, Farrakhan renounced his membership in 1977 (Magida, 1996). Not long after his defection, Farrakhan aligned himself with Elijah Muhammad loyalists (both in the Imam's community and outside) to reestablish the teachings and practices of "The Messenger," Elijah Muhammad, under a reconstituted NOI.

The Horizon of Minister Louis Farrakhan

Louis Farrakhan was born Louis Eugene Walcott in 1933 (Magida, 1996). A college educated Calypso singer, Walcott joined the NOI in 1955 where his name was subsequently changed to Farrakhan. A native of Boston, Massachusetts, Farrakhan showed immediate oratory promise and quickly rose through the ranks of the NOI. Having been mentored by the NOI's electrifying National Representative Malcolm X, Farrakhan eventually became the minister of the Boston mosque. Then, after the assassination of Malcolm X, Farrakhan assumed leadership of Mosque #7 in Harlem, New York (Magida, 1996). As minister of the powerful New York mosque, as well as serving as the National Representative of the NOI, Farrakhan was a very popular and successful proselytizer of the teachings of Elijah Muhammad.

The horizon of Minister Farrakhan is firmly rooted in the history and tradition of the Black experience in America. His lived experience as a Black man in pre-civil rights America greatly informs the vantage point of his horizon. The fore-knowledge and prejudices harbored by the Minister are informed by the history of exploitation and oppression of American Blacks by Whites. This history includes the African slave trade, the Middle Passage, American chattel slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, lynching, racism, and discrimination. This history situates Minister Farrakhan squarely within the context of a society where an oppressed minority is lorded over by a dominant and repressive majority. In addition to this socio-historic aspect of the Minister's horizon, there also exists a vantage point from his membership in the NOI, a nationalist group with a radical and racialized religious, educational, political, and social doctrine. This doctrine, through the use of counter-storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), ethno-centric myth-making (Berg, 2005), and racialized narrative-inversions (Acevedo, Ordner, & Thompson, 2010), attempts to rehabilitate and revitalize a Black community devastated by centuries of mental, physical, spiritual, psychological, and social subjugation by Whites.

Farrakhan's doctrine - a rearticulation of Elijah Muhammad's customized, racialized, Islamic liberation theology - also promotes a corporeal, anthropomorphic depiction of God. In the words of Elijah Muhammad (1965), "Your God and my God is a material being - the Supreme of Beings" (p. 4). Further elaborating the point, Muhammad stated, "God is a man and we just cannot make Him other than man, lest we make Him an inferior one" (p. 6). This core tenet of Elijah Muhammad's teaching is the foundation of Minister Farrakhan's Islam. The vantage points of an oppressed minority under an oppressive majority, an adherent of a racialized, recuperative Islamic tradition, and an advocate of a corporeal conception of God, all coalesce to form the horizon of Minister Louis Farrakhan.

The Horizon of Imam Warith Deen Mohammed
In many ways, the horizon of Imam Mohammed mirrors that of Minister Farrakhan. Imam Mohammed, was the seventh of eight children born to Elijah and Clara Muhammad in 1933 (Gardell, 1996). The Imam certainly shares the Minister's vantage point of an oppressed minority living in a society dominated by an oppressive majority. Being reared in the NOI, the Imam, at one point, shared the Minister's vantage point of membership in a contextualized, racialized, Islamic liberation organization that espoused a corporeal understand of God. While Imam Mohammed and Minister Farrakhan share the socio-historic vantage point of being black men reared in a pre-civil rights, highly racialized society, their religious vantage points are drastically different.

The Imam's interpretation of Islam and of the nature of God/Allah has always proved to be more in line with Islamic orthodoxy than with the teachings of the NOI and his father. Far from surprising, the Imam's ultimate renunciation of the NOI's doctrine, and his subsequent adoption of orthodox Islam, were evident even during the Imam's time in the NOI (Lincoln, 1994; Magida, 1996; Marable, 2011). Through exposure to an orthodox Islamic teacher while attending the schools ran by the NOI, and later, while serving time in federal prison for refusing induction into the military, a young Wallace (Imam Mohammed) began to seriously question the Islamic interpretation, application, and practice of his father (Gardell, 1996; Magida, 1996). The discontent manifested itself on several occasions throughout his life in the NOI. Wallace would often express disbelief in his father's teachings. On three separate occasions, he was suspended from the organization for his dissenting views (Gardell, 1996). The last of his defections and subsequent returns took place in 1974, approximately one year before the passing of his father. It was not until his father's departure (and him assuming leadership of the NOI) that Wallace's inclination toward orthodox, Sunni Islam was made official NOI doctrine (Gardell, 1996; Lincoln, 1994; Magida, 1996; Marable, 2011). By becoming a devout member of the orthodox, Sunni branch of Islam, the Imam patently rejected any attempt to ascribe a physical body to Allah/God. This was based on the orthodox Islamic belief that God is an incorporeal, unseen, spirit and to liken any form to Allah/God is the height of Islamic heresy (Ali, 1990).

It is the collective views of an oppressed minority living under an oppressive majority and an adherent of the incorporeal conception of God as prescribed by the orthodox Islamic world that inform the horizon of Imam Mohammed. Through his identification with the orthodox doctrine of Islam, the Imam has a religious history, tradition, prejudice, and fore-knowledge in stark contrast with that of Minister Farrakhan.

It is the previously described horizons of Minister Farrakhan and Imam Mohammed that meet in the interview currently under analysis.

The Interview

The historic 2002 interview with Minister Louis Farrakhan and Imam Mohammed is important because it represents the first time the two leaders have met and agreed to speak publicly (Muhammad, 2014). The roughly half-hour interview was part of a larger Islamic commemoration. For the interview, Minister Farrakhan and Imam Mohammed were placed

opposite an interviewer, who himself is a member of the orthodox Islamic community. The discussion that is captured focused solely on arguably the most discordant issue between the Minister and the Imam, the reality of Allah/God in the person of Master Fard Muhammad. The video is also important because it allows for the application of Gadamer's PH principles to an actual dialogue between parties with deep, theological differences. By identifying the horizons of the participants, analyzing the language and dialogue of the interview's hermeneutic circle, and assessing the openness of the participants during the interview, a hermeneutic analysis can determine if in fact a fusion of horizons occurred between the Minister and the Imam around the nature of God.

The Hermeneutic Circle of the Interview

The interview itself can be found online: (https://youtu.be/oSxnTL-G5yc?t=1m19s). The clip allows for an analysis of the dialogue in light of the hermeneutic principles described by Gadamer. One such principle is the hermeneutic circle. This is the process whereby understanding is co-constructed by dialogue participants through the ebb and flow of conversation. The relationship of the hermeneutic circle to one's horizon is described by Moules et al. (2015) as "the movement of existing understanding, or prejudice, into constructive interchange with another" (p. 44). The analysis of this interview between the Imam and the Minister affords us the opportunity to analyze the interplay of their horizons throughout the course of the conversation's hermeneutic circle.

The initial exchanges of the interview address the historic coming together of the two leaders. After both the Imam and the Minister address the circumstances and timing behind the meeting, the interviewer first addresses Minister Farrakhan. While the object of his question (Master Fard Muhammad being God in person) is to be expected, the phrasing of the question is telling. In addressing the Minister's corporeal view of God, the interviewer notes that Farrakhan's view is drastically different than the orthodox Islamic conception of God as an incorporeal being. Seeking conformity to the orthodox view, the interviewer, at one point early in the discussion, asks the Minister to "shed some light and put this out of the way so that we go forward" (Muhammad, 2014). The request to "put this out of the way" could be taken as an attempt to summarily disabuse Minister Farrakhan of his contrarian belief on the nature of Allah/God so that a "legitimate" dialogue can then proceed. The nature of the interviewer's question is an example of "inauthentic dialogue" (Gadamer, 1994). As Gadamer informed us:

> There is the critical distinction between authentic and inauthentic dialogue. To someone who engages in dialogue only to prove himself right and not gain insight, asking questions will indeed seem easier than answering them…In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know… Discourse that is intended to reveal something requires that that thing be broken open by the question. (p. 363)

Rather than a discussion of the nature of God being "broken open by the question," it seems the interviewer was intent on closing down the discussion before it even began.

In responding to the interviewer's question, the Minister affirms his view of Master Fard Muhammad as Allah/God in person but also displays an openness to expand his theological horizon. Minister Farrakhan explains his unorthodox view of Islam by saying, "The starting point is not the finishing point. The starting point is letting us know that we have a journey" (Muhammad, 2014). In making this statement, the Minister suggests that his horizon is open and that his vantage point may very well change as his knowledge changes. Additionally, by referencing "journey," Minister Farrakhan is admitting that movement will take place and that his current horizon will shift as his knowledge and experience shifts. This willingness to remain open and the expectation of movement is captured by Vessey (2015):

> Our intellectual horizons change whenever we learn something new or when we weigh differently what we already know, and these changes do not require crossing beyond the limits of our understanding…The horizon is…something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for someone who is moving. To 'move' conceptually requires simply gaining new information or new insights, a common enough event. (p. 540)

This kind of openness is critical for understandings to develop within the hermeneutic circle of a conversation. Lawn and Keane (2011) described the relationship of openness to the hermeneutic circle by noting that "the hermeneutic circle does not involve closing the interpreter in upon themselves, but rather a systematic openness to the otherness of the text and to the voice of the other" (p. 71). Minister Farrakhan's response demonstrates a willingness, an expectation even, to readjust his horizon in order to gain a fuller understanding of the nature of God.

Following Minister Farrakhan's response, the interviewer again chooses to "dwell on Fard Muhammad." He follows up with another comment about the "troublesome" view of Fard Muhammad being "God on Earth." This line of questioning fails to demonstrate any openness to the "other" or even a willingness to understand the view presented by Minister Farrakhan. Rather than offering up his horizon for interrogation, the interviewer appears to only be concerned with getting Minister Farrakhan to renounce his belief. This runs contrary to a hermeneutics of understanding as described by Gadamer. The interviewer's rigid adherence to his own horizon fails to invoke a fundamental tenet of PH that says

> we cannot stick blindly to our own fore-meaning about the thing if we want to understand the meaning of another… this does not mean that when we listen to someone or read a book we must forget all our fore-meanings concerning the content and all our own ideas. All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 268)

In response to the interviewer's inquiry, Minister Farrakhan attempts to explain his view of God through the use of scripture from the Quran, the holy book of Islam, and through statements made at a previous talk by Imam Mohammed. The Quranic reference and the reference to the Imam's talk buttressed Farrakhan's position that God's spirit can reside in man and how God, when desirous of sending correction and guidance to humans, elects to raise other humans as an example of righteousness. In bringing these points together, Minister Farrakhan says, "We saw God in what this man did to bring us out of the horrible condition that we're in" (Muhammad,

2014). In making his point in this way, Minister Farrakhan did not "forget all his fore-meanings" nor all of his "own ideas." Rather, Farrakhan attempted to guide the interviewer and the Imam to understand his view by offering it in a manner familiar to *their* horizons. By appealing to the fore-knowledge of the others and by presenting his beliefs in terms familiar to them, the Minister is engaging in a critically important act within the hermeneutic circle. For Gadamer, the aim of the hermeneutic circle

> is to throw the interpreter back on his/her own initial preconceptions and to force the reader to come back to them, to review and correct them, through repeated comparison with the object or matter of interpretation. (Lawn & Keane, 2011, p. 71)

By wrapping his conception of God in the scriptures of the Quran and in the teachings of Imam Mohammed, Minister Farrakhan was actually throwing the others "back on his/her own initial preconceptions" with the hopes of them reaching a better understanding of his view through the reflective lens of their own views.

In ending his comment, Minister Farrakhan says, "I would just close that point because I don't think that we should focus on the things which create division because we have more in common than we do in division" (Muhammad, 2014). By attempting to work toward agreement rather than division, Minister Farrakhan has again invoked a critical tenet of Gadamer's view of conversation. In PH, conversation is "a process of coming to an understanding…What is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of his opinion so that we can be at one with each other on the subject" (Gadamer, 1994, p. 385). In wanting to focus on the congruence of their views rather than the divergent aspects of their views, the Minister is seeking understanding within the mutual "rightness" of their shared positions. He is seeking communion with the Imam and the interviewer.

As Minister Farrakhan completes his response, the interviewer picks up with another statement regarding how divergent Minister Farrakhan's depiction of God is from the orthodox standard. In a subsequent follow up, the interviewer again bombards Minister Farrakhan with criticisms of his divergent articulation. It appears that, absent Minister Farrakhan renouncing his belief wholeheartedly, the interviewer is unwilling to put his own horizon "at risk" or to "transpose himself" into the Minister's perspective (Gadamer, 1994). A similar back and forth continues for the next several minutes. The Minister again offers an explanation from the horizons of the Imam and the interviewer. Then, the interviewer again follows up with comments pointing out the orthodox Islamic view of God and how Minister Farrakhan's view falls outside of it. In a closing remark to this portion of the talk, the Minister again shows his openness to put his horizon "at risk" by saying, "I still think there's a lot that we have to learn of what Master Fard Muhammad taught" (Muhammad, 2014). This again exemplifies an openness to possibly adjusting his view and of moving his horizon based on the accumulation of future knowledge and experience.

Next, the Imam re-enters the discussion. Not having spoken since the beginning moments of the interview, the Imam describes his theological disagreement with his father, The Honorable Elijah Muhammad. He details a conversation where he confessed his disbelief in his father's teachings. The Imam then tells the story of a conversation he had with his mother, Clara Muhammad, immediately after being excommunicated by his father for his disbelief. He recounts asking his

mother if Master Fard Muhammad ever declared himself to be God. She replied that he had not. The Imam then asked his mother how he could be expected to believe that Fard Muhammad was God when Fard never claimed to be such. These comments give insight into the deeply personal and hurtful experiences that no doubt factor into the horizon of the Imam. These statements, like those of the interviewer, show that the Imam has resigned himself, from the start, to relying solely on his own fore-meanings and prejudices as they relate to Master Fard Muhammad not being Allah/God in person.

The next few minutes of the discussion include an acknowledgement on the part of the Imam and the interviewer. Both admit to the sincerity of Master Fard Muhammad and the great work he did to help the Black community. After this agreement, the interviewer once again attempts to refute the claim that Master Fard Muhammad is God in person by referencing the "1.2 billion" orthodox Muslims in the world who hold an opposing view. Minister Farrakhan, addressing the criticism of the interviewer, pulls again from the scriptures of the Holy Quran as well as from one of the oft-repeated prayers in the Muslim world. He concludes this statement as before, with the claim that a "greater understanding" will be gained through scripture and prayer. Using the Quran, referencing the Islamic prayers, and acknowledging that a "greater understanding" is yet to be had are all examples of the Minister not relinquishing his horizon but rather, opening it up, putting it at risk, and seeking to appeal to the horizons of the Imam and the interviewer.

Adding on to Minister Farrakhan's remarks, the Imam offers an articulation of Master Fard Muhammad that begins to approach Minister Farrakhan's horizon. The Imam acknowledges that Fard Muhammad was indeed a "master" by saying, "He was a master psychologist. He knew how to deal with people with problems and help them" (Muhammad, 2014). The Imam then equates the methods used by Master Fard Muhammad to those used by Jesus in the Bible. In equating Fard and his methods with Jesus (whom Christians believe was God in person) and his methods, it appears that the Imam has subtly opened himself up to the view of Master Fard Muhammad held by Minister Farrakhan. He has not relinquished his own view, but instead, has attempted to grasp the "substantive rightness" of Minister Farrakhan's perspective on Master Fard Muhammad. This is in line with Gadamer's view of understanding wherein he writes:

> When we try to understand…we do not try to transpose ourselves into the author's mind but, if one wants to use this terminology, we try to transpose ourselves into the perspective within which he has formed his views. But this simply means that we try to understand how what he is saying could be right. If we want to understand, we will try to make his arguments even stronger. (1994, p. 292)

Next, in another promising moment, Minister Farrakhan begins discussing Master Fard Muhammad's instructions to Elijah Muhammad before his departure in 1934. In mentioning a purported 104 books Master Fard Muhammad instructed Elijah Muhammad to read, Farrakhan reports that Elijah Muhammad said the most important of these books was the Holy Quran and the other 103 books all contained pertinent aspects of the life of Prophet Muhammad (Muhammad, 2014). Farrakhan further notes how Elijah Muhammad shared with him his desire for ministers in the NOI to stop teaching from the Bible and start teaching from the Quran. Going further, Farrakhan addresses how Elijah Muhammad's ultimate aim was to move the NOI, theologically, in the direction of the larger Muslim world. This move, however, was not intended

to bring about assimilation and subservience to the orthodox Islamic community. Since the orthodox Muslim world had deviated from the true path of Islam, Elijah Muhammad wished for his followers to adopt the good of the orthodox world while his peculiar brand of Islam would insulate them from the bad of the orthodox world. At several moments while Farrakhan is speaking, the Imam chimes in with agreement. When Farrakhan finished, the Imam mentioned that he never heard his father express those desires but believed the Minister's words to be true. By encountering this new information, and with the expressions of agreement with Minister Farrakhan's words, here again was another possible moment of fusion on the part of the Imam. According to Vessey (2009):

> Horizons fuse when an individual realizes how the context of the subject matter can be weighted differently to lead to a different interpretation from the one initially arrived at. Either new information or a new sense of the relative significance of available information leads, at the very least, to an understanding of the contingency of the initial interpretation, quite possibly to a new understanding of the subject matter, and ideally to a new agreement between the two parties about the subject matter. In any case, the original understanding is surpassed and integrated into a broader, more informed understanding. Our horizons are broadened; we have a new perspective on our old views, and maybe new views as well. This is the meaning of 'the fusion of horizons'. (p. 540)

The new information presented to the Imam by the Minister may very well have altered, broadened, or otherwise surpassed the Imam's original understanding of the type and purpose of Islam that was taught by his father.

After this exchange, the interviewer again acknowledges the "undeniable" and "uncontested" role of Master Fard Muhammad in bringing Islam to Blacks in the Depression era slums of Detroit but points out that this acknowledgement is separate from the characterization of Master Fard Muhammad as "God on Earth." In his follow up comment, the interviewer once again dismisses any openness to the Minister's horizon. In addition, he continues to show an unwillingness to put his own horizon at risk while persisting in his attempt to elicit a retraction from the Minister. The interviewer displays his unwillingness to even entertain the Minister's view of Fard Muhammad by saying, "If we have, eh, eh, you know, gotten the explanation from you that we were not dealing with Fard Muhammad as God on Earth then we are fine, we can go forward with this discussion" (Muhammad, 2014). Here the interviewer is actually disrupting, if not negating, the dialogic flow which is so intrinsic to the possibility of achieving understanding. In PH, the fusion of horizons comes out of the play of the hermeneutic circle. It emanates from the flow of the dialogue that takes place within the conversation. For the interviewer, however, the conversation cannot even begin until the Minister relinquishes his horizon and adopts the horizon of the interviewer. This flagrant violation of the hermeneutic process is made clear in light of Gadamer's view of the purpose of conversation. As Gadamer (1994) explained:

> Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says. (p. 385)

Though the interviewer's disruptive and negating remark was aimed at the Minister, the Imam interjects with a comment. In his response, Imam Mohammed again invokes the Bible. He notes how Jesus never referred to himself as "God." Instead, the Imam points out that Jesus asked Peter "Who do you say I am," to which Peter responded by giving Jesus a lofty and divine title. The Imam then likens this Biblical exchange to Master Fard Muhammad and Elijah Muhammad. Referencing "The Lessons" (the esoteric catechisms and teachings given by Master Fard Muhammad to the NOI), the Imam insinuates that it was Elijah Muhammad, not Fard, who instigated the idea of Fard being God in person. The Imam's comment achieves two things. First, he is again equating Master Fard Muhammad with Jesus (God in person to Christians). At the same time, he is also making the point that neither Jesus nor Fard Muhammad ever called themselves God. It was their followers who elevated them to such divine heights.

The point made here by the Imam can be taken as further criticism of the Minister's view. In pointing out that Master Fard Muhammad (like Jesus) never referred to himself as God, the Imam is setting up the argument that it was Elijah Muhammad who came up with the erroneous, though sincere, characterization of Fard Muhammad as God on Earth. The Imam closes his comments by referring to the methodology of Master Fard Muhammad. In the view of the Imam, the arcane, mathematical, and problem-oriented nature of "The Lessons" were devised by Fard to eventually lead the NOI toward adopting orthodox, or "real," Islamic doctrine. By Master Fard Muhammad devising the teachings in this way, the Imam then suggests that Fard, "planned for me to come to *real* Islam, and it worked" (Muhammad, 2014). The fullness of the Imam's remarks, and the multiple characterizations of his view of orthodox Islam as "real" Islam, shows derision toward the Islamic beliefs of Minister Farrakhan. This ultimately shows the Imam's remark to be a further rejection of the Minister's horizon.

In the final exchange of the video, the interviewer summarizes the discussion. Here, the interviewer attempts to gain consensus among the three by asking, "Are we then saying that we all here believe in one God and the finality of Prophet Muhammad, uh, and that's where it ends?" (Muhammad, 2014). In response to the question, the Imam quickly responds, "That's where it ends." Immediately after the Imam's statement, Minister Farrakhan responds with, "Or that's where it begins," and the interview closes with the three men laughing in agreement that, "that's where it begins." This ending is reminiscent of Lawn and Keane's (2011) discussion of Gadamer's notion of "play." They describe it as

> a to and fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end. Play is an activity that is not random and yet has no obvious goal or teleological endpoint; purposeful and yet without some grand overarching purpose. (p. 109)

Play in this sense is the actual "game" of the dialogue. It is the engagement in, and flow of, the dialogue that all of the parties took part in. While the interviewer tried imposing an ending to the play of the conversation and force an understanding among the three, the ultimate reality is that the process of understanding, as Minister Farrakhan's closing remark suggests, is never ending and is always in "play."

The Fusion of Horizons

With regard to a fusion of horizons, three outcomes emerged in the interview between the Minister and the Imam. First, the Imam mostly held fast to his own horizon but, on occasion, opened himself up to the horizon of Minister Farrakhan. At one point during the discussion, it appeared that the Imam did indeed have a fusion of horizons with the Minister regarding the purpose of Elijah Muhammad's teachings and the ultimate relationship between the NOI and the orthodox Muslim world. The Imam received new knowledge and that knowledge allowed him to adjust his view from his initial perspective. At another point, the Imam seemed to slightly open himself up to the Minister's characterization of Master Fard Muhammad as God in person by juxtaposing Fard with Biblical references to Jesus (whom Christians believe to be God in person) and Jesus' teaching methods. In those moments, the partial shift in the Imam's view and his attempt to see the "substantive rightness" of the Minister's position resulted in a partial fusion with the horizon of Minister Farrkhan.

From a PH perspective, Minister Farrakhan exhibited the disposition and openness most necessary for a fusion of horizons to occur. From the very beginning, the Minister was willing to put his horizon at risk, to accommodate aspects of the horizons of the others, and to willfully admit the potential of his horizon to change based on the acquisition of new knowledge and experience. Unlike the Imam and the interviewer, Minister Farrakhan never attempted to invalidate the positions of the others. The Minister, in offering explanations of his position, invoked and incorporated aspects of their horizons in an attempt to illustrate the "substantive rightness" of all three participants. In these ways, Minister Farrakhan successfully manifested a fusion of horizons. Vessey (2009) noted that a fusion

> is not necessarily agreement about the subject matter, but it is, by Gadamer's definition, a shared understanding about the subject matter. While the participants in a dialogue still aim at agreement, the dialogue is a success if each has acquired a new perspective from which to see the subject matter…They have either revised their evaluations, or they have set their evaluations in a larger context of possible evaluations. (p. 541)

By this definition, the shifting perspectives, the partial fusion of the Imam, and the openness and the willing fusions of the Minister proved their dialogue to be a "success."

And then there is the interviewer. A strong case could be made that the interviewer's horizon should not be considered at all in this particular analysis. One could argue that, by virtue of being an interviewer, he is not necessarily entering the hermeneutic circle seeking understanding. His goal may simply be to provoke discussion, conflict even, between the Minister and the Imam. As valid as this claim could be in other scenarios, in this case, the interviewer's one-sided focus belies that conclusion. An interviewer looking to agitate would do so to both interlocutors. They would search for opportunities to seize upon the positions of both sides. From the beginning of the interview, however, this interviewer abandoned any sense of balanced questioning. He was intent on introducing his own horizon into the hermeneutic circle and this was made clear by his sole focus on assailing Minister Farrakhan's position. Despite consistently inserting himself into the hermeneutic circle, the interviewer never exhibited a desire to seriously open himself to the position of the Minister. From his questions being "asked wrongly" (Gadamer, 1994) to antagonistic calls for retraction solely directed at the Minister, the interviewer's goal was quite evident, the subjugation of Minister Farrakhan's position to his own.

Conclusion

In this study, I sought to deploy Gadamer's PH in an analysis of an historic interview between two religious leaders with antagonistic histories and beliefs. In addition to highlighting PH principles that emerged throughout the interview, a major goal of this study was the identification of a possible fusion of horizons between Minister Farrakhan and Imam Mohammed. To be sure, given its highly personal, and deeply internalized nature, determining someone's horizon, as well as identifying a fusion of horizons, is a highly subjective and immensely difficult task. However, analyzing a dialogic encounter in light of the tenets of PH provides a sturdy framework for approximation.

The implications of the current study are far reaching. By applying PH principles (play, horizon, conversation, openness, hermeneutic circle, dialogue, etc.) to this real world, dialogic encounter between participants who harbored deep-seated, divergent views, the current study highlighted several beneficial practices. Such practices included suspending, though not relinquishing, one's own position, being truly open to the vantage point of the other, adopting the position of the other in an attempt to make it stronger, and utilizing the horizon of the other as a means of making one's own horizon more understandable. These practices were catalysts for the fusions that came out of the hermeneutic circle of this particular encounter. More generally, these practices, if implemented, may also increase the likelihood of enabling more authentic and more productive conversations in general.

Last, while a fusion of horizons between the Minister and the Imam was the initial focus of the study, the presence of the interviewer's horizon quickly became apparent. But, his horizon was not the only one that intruded upon this meeting between the Minister and the Imam. In truth, there were *four* horizons at play; the Minister's, the Imam's, the interviewer's, and my own. If a true PH analysis is to be conducted, my horizon, my "prior commitments," and my own vantage points must also be considered in the analysis. From my horizon comes the initial interest in the topic of the interview. From my horizon comes the value I ascribed to the Minister and the Imam. From my horizon comes the magnitude in which I view their meeting. And, from my horizon comes my interpretation of the words of each party.

My horizon is that of a black male and a Muslim living in a racialized, post 9/11 America. This horizon, similar to those of the Minister and the Imam, also includes the vantage point of an oppressed minority reared under an oppressive majority and a vantage point of one influenced by a racialized, recuperative, Islamic tradition that advocates a corporeal conception of God. From this horizon comes my overall characterization of this interview as a metaphor for all inter and intra religious dialogue. In my experiences, inter and intra religious conversations (as well as conversations generally) invariably include one who sticks rigidly to their horizon (like the interviewer), one bound to their horizon but who, reluctantly, shifts (like the Imam), or one, like the Minister, who enters the conversation fully committed to putting their horizon at risk in order to gain understanding. In any given dialogue, one of these prototypes may be present or all three

may be present. The presence of all three in this particular interview was integral to the shift that ultimately occurred in my own horizon.

My personal fusion occurred in two parts. First, if an honest assessment is rendered, I (like the interviewer) have been accustomed to entering conversations with the goal of winning, converting, or convincing rather than entering conversations with the goal of *understanding*. While my initial exposure to PH revealed an altogether different approach to conversations, actually witnessing PH within the hermeneutic play of this interview is ultimately what instigated a shift in my horizon. The ability of Minister Farrakhan to consistently appeal to the horizon of the "other," and the effort by the Imam of attempting to strengthen the position of the "other," were invaluable lessons to me and should be to all who seek to "understand." Their example resulted in a "new perspective" for me, a perspective informed by seeing these PH concepts in action. This new perspective is one that has effectively shifted me away from an adversarial orientation in dialogue and toward an orientation that seeks to be more sensitive to the "other's" alterity (Gadamer, 1994).

My second fusion was more general in scope and came about as a result of the promise that the dialogue between the Minister and the Imam represents. Reflecting back on my time in the NOI, the position of many of the members I encountered ranged from a faint hope for reconciliation with the Imam and his community, to outright enmity. Being aware of both the deep wounds caused by the Imam's disavowal of his father's work, and the oppositional nature of the doctrine and practices of the Imam and the Minister, I personally viewed a reconciliation between the two as not only improbable, but also theologically impossible. That remained my view until I stumbled across this interview. Just as the examples of the Minister and the Imam offered me another vantage point for approaching a conversation, their examples also gave me a bold, new perspective on the real possibility of not just their reconciliation, but of something much greater, the possibility of achieving mutual *understanding* between other ostensibly intractable schisms, schisms like those between Muslims and Christians, Sunnis and Shias, or even Palestinians and Israelis.

The fusions that took place between the Minister and the Imam should offer a glimmer of hope to the reader as well. For, in their example lies the hermeneutic and dialogic blueprint that may prove helpful, not just in the realm of inter and intra religious dialogue, but in *any* encounter where the goal is to understand an "other."

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