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The International Malcolm X

The Significance of Travel in the Ideological Evolution of "the Angriest Black Man in America"

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ABSTRACT

Il 2 luglio 1964 è entrato nella storia degli Stati Uniti come un momento di svolta per la popolazione afroamericana: nei quasi cento anni che seguirono l'approvazione dei tre emendamenti della Ricostruzione, infatti, la segregazione razziale (de facto dove non era esercitata de iure) rimase parte integrante della società statunitense. Tuttavia, quando a meno di un anno dal suo insediamento e due giorni prima del Giorno dell'Indipendenza il presidente americano Lyndon B. Johnson approvò il Civil Rights Act, segnando di fatto la fine dell'era delle leggi Jim Crow, il paese sembrò finalmente pronto a voltare pagina. Tra gli illustri partecipanti alla cerimonia della firma del Civil Rights Act, svoltasi nella East Room della Casa Bianca e trasmessa in diretta dalle emittenti televisive americane, è impossibile non notare il reverendo Martin Luther King, immortalato in alcuni iconici scatti alle spalle del Presidente Johnson mentre quest'ultimo gli consegnava una penna per apporre una firma al disegno di legge. Al centro dell'attenzione mediatica da quasi un decennio per il suo notevole contributo al movimento per i diritti civili, la notorietà di Martin Luther King non fece che decollare nel 1964, anno che concluse addirittura con la vittoria del Premio Nobel per la pace.

Mentre Martin Luther King veniva accolto alla Casa Bianca e faceva incetta di riconoscimenti, un altro personaggio stava dando un contributo diverso ma altrettanto importante alla causa degli afroamericani: Malcolm X. Troppo spesso ricordato nel limitato ruolo di antagonista o di controparte arrabbiata e violenta di Martin Luther King, Malcolm X visse un anno incredibilmente intenso tra il 1964 e l'inizio del 1965, che si interruppe con la sua tragica uccisione all'Audubon Ballroom di Harlem, dove venne accolto da una scarica di proiettili appena mise piede sul palco del teatro newyorkese.

Questa tesi esamina l'ultimo anno di vita di Malcolm X; in particolare, l'oggetto di studio sono i viaggi che intraprese in questo periodo chiave della sua vita e l'influenza che ebbero sulla sua ideologia. Dopo aver servito per dodici anni Elijah Muhammad e la sua Nation of Islam, nel marzo 1964 Malcolm X annunciò la sua separazione dall'organizzazione musulmana ma continuò a lottare per il riconoscimento dei diritti umani, non semplicemente civili, della popolazione nera americana. Con l'indipendenza, Malcolm X poté adottare un approccio più

critico, proattivo e secolare che contribuì a cambiare la maniera in cui comprendeva la società statunitense e non solo.

La letteratura che si è occupata del periodo finale della vita di Malcolm X presenta evidenti carenze e imperfezioni: basandosi prevalentemente sull'*Autobiografia di Malcolm X*, una grande opera letteraria ma non necessariamente una ricostruzione oggettiva della sua vita, molti autori sono caduti nell'errore di valutare Malcolm X in maniera acritica, contribuendo a lasciare in eredità un'immagine sensazionalizzata e apparentemente priva di contraddizioni. Inoltre, si tende a considerare le esperienze internazionali del 1964 come eventi che stravolsero il pensiero di Malcolm X, ritenendo che i viaggi all'estero avevano creato un uomo nuovo e sminuendo quindi i cambiamenti che erano già in corso da tempo. Infine, negli scritti di diversi studiosi si può notare come l'analisi di singole aree di cambiamento nell'ideologia di Malcolm X sia stata erroneamente condotta ignorando l'interdipendenza del suo pensiero politico, religioso e razziale.

In generale, ciò che emerge da questo studio è come il mito di Malcolm X abbia oscurato chi lui fosse realmente. L'obiettivo di questa tesi, di conseguenza, è quello di dimostrare quanto tra 1964 e inizio 1965 (ovvero, una volta liberatosi dal dogmatismo della Nation of Islam e avere esplorato nuove realtà al di fuori degli Stati Uniti) le posizioni ideologiche di Malcolm X siano effettivamente cambiate e quali sono stati i fattori che hanno contribuito a questi cambiamenti. Attraverso una breve discussione dei suoi primi trentotto anni di vita e una più approfondita analisi del periodo che parte da marzo 1964 e si conclude nel febbraio dell'anno seguente, questa tesi dimostra che i viaggi hanno avuto un ruolo fondamentale nell'accelerazione dell'evoluzione ideologica di Malcolm X nei mesi precedenti alla sua morte, ma vanno inseriti nello studio di un contesto più ampio per evitare di ritenerli il solo fattore decisivo in questa trasformazione.

Dopo una breve introduzione, il primo capitolo offre una panoramica della vita di Malcolm X fino ad inizio 1964: come viene dimostrato in maniera concisa, l'infanzia e l'adolescenza sono stati periodi fondamentali nell'instillare in Malcolm X una visione della società americana come intrinsecamente e inesorabilmente razzista (non a caso, il primo capitolo della *Autobiografia*, nel quale viene trattato l'inizio di questo periodo, è intitolato "incubo"). Nato nel 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska, Malcolm X (o, al tempo, Malcolm Little) e la sua famiglia furono costretti a numerosi trasferimenti nel Midwest durante i tardi anni Venti e primi Trenta per via delle minacce ricevute da gruppi di suprematisti bianchi. In circostanze che Malcolm X

ricollegò sempre al razzismo, nel 1931 il padre morì investito da un tram (la ricostruzione delle autorità locali, secondo cui cadde accidentalmente sulle rotaie, appare effettivamente poco credibile) e pochi anni dopo la madre venne internata in un ospedale psichiatrico. Gli assistenti sociali separarono Malcolm X e i suoi fratelli, assegnandoli a famiglie della zona. A sedici anni, Malcolm X venne accolto dalla sorellastra a Boston, dove iniziò a frequentare il ghetto e attività clandestine. Trasferitosi a New York nei primi anni Quaranta, Malcolm X entra definitivamente nel mondo della criminalità, che gli costerà la prigione a soli ventun anni: qui scoprì la Nation of Islam, un'organizzazione pseudo-religiosa che sottolineava l'importanza della riforma morale e del recupero dell'orgoglio razziale della popolazione nera, etichettando la popolazione bianca come diavoli. Riconoscendosi nella dottrina della Nation of Islam, Malcolm X aderì a questo movimento e nel giro di pochi anni dall'uscita di prigione ne divenne il principale esponente. In parte per questa ragione e in parte per divergenze di altra natura, Malcolm X fu costretto ad abbandonare la Nation of Islam nel marzo 1964, dopo esserne stato sospeso quattro mesi prima.

Il secondo capitolo riprende da questo punto, esattamente dodici mesi prima dell'assassinio di Malcolm X, e introduce i viaggi di aprile e maggio 1964 partendo da un'esperienza spesso trascurata dagli storici che ebbe luogo nell'estate del 1959 e che lo portò per la prima volta in Medio Oriente e Africa nel ruolo di emissario di Elijah Muhammad. Prima di discutere il secondo tour internazionale, vengono analizzati tre importanti discorsi pronunciati nel mese che seguì la separazione dalla Nation of Islam: attraverso il loro studio, è possibile notare come molti cambiamenti ideologici che alcuni studiosi hanno attribuito alle esperienze estere erano in realtà già stati espressi in questo periodo antecedente.

La seconda parte del capitolo tratta i primi viaggi del 1964. Malcolm X partì con l'intenzione di avvicinarsi all'Islam ortodosso e quindi la prima tappa del tour nel mondo islamico non poteva che essere La Mecca, dove compì il tradizionale pellegrinaggio. Secondo l'*Autobiografia*, questo evento fu decisivo nel realizzare che la natura del razzismo era da ricercare nei comportamenti umani e non nel colore di pelle; per questo motivo, non era più ragionevole accusare i bianchi di essere diavoli per natura, come invece predicava Elijah Muhammad. Tale conclusione è stata talvolta interpretata come una svolta grazie alla quale Malcolm X smise di disprezzare la popolazione bianca, mentre in realtà si trattava solo di una riformulazione di ciò che "uomo bianco" significava nella sua retorica: anche smettendo di accusare l'americano bianco per il colore della sua pelle, giudicarlo secondo le sue azioni

significava comunque condannarlo, perché esibiva un comportamento sistematicamente razzista (seppure, Malcolm X specificò più volte soprattutto nell'ultimo anno, parlare di "uomo bianco" non significava rivolgersi a ogni singola persona bianca, quanto piuttosto a ciò che collettivamente avevano rappresentato e continuavano a rappresentare come oppressori della popolazione afroamericana). Un ulteriore problema riscontrabile nella letteratura esistente risiede nel fatto che talvolta viene trascurato come Malcolm X abbia idealizzato nei suoi scritti e discorsi l'esperienza nel mondo musulmano nell'aprile 1964. In questa tesi, quindi, l'argomento viene discusso in maniera quanto più possibile critica, in modo da rivelare la rappresentazione volutamente naïve dei musulmani in Medio Oriente come una scelta che Malcolm X fece al fine di promuovere l'Islam ortodosso e di rivisitare l'immagine negativa che si aveva di lui in America attraverso l'annuncio della sua conversione a quella religione, includendo il relativo distanziamento dalla Nation of Islam.

La fase successiva del viaggio portò Malcolm X in Africa dove, in un soggiorno con finalità prevalentemente politiche (già in maggio stava stabilendo contatti con alcuni leader africani per perseguire presso le Nazioni Unite un piano che prevedeva la denuncia degli Stati Uniti per la violazione dei diritti umani della sua popolazione nera), fornì anche diverse riflessioni sul concetto di identità nera: collegando le lotte anti-coloniali africane con la lotta per i diritti degli afroamericani, Malcolm X abbracciò la filosofia panafricanista e sottolineò spesso che la decolonizzazione del continente avrebbe giovato a tutte le popolazioni della diaspora africana, in quanto favoriva la creazione di un'immagine positiva dell'Africa, che a sua volta inorgogliva gli altri popoli neri e li spingeva ad emulare simili movimenti di liberazione domesticamente. Malcolm X attribuiva al governo americano l'intenzione di ostacolare tale riconoscimento reciproco delle popolazioni nere nei due continenti, sia per questioni interne (tenere "dormienti" i dimostranti che stavano perdendo fede nella protesta nonviolenta) sia internazionali (per logiche legate ad alleanze nel contesto bipolare della Guerra Fredda). Il capitolo include numerosi opinioni espresse da Malcolm X e dimostrazioni di come la sua ideologia fosse in rapida e costante evoluzione: per esempio, una conversazione con l'ambasciatore algerino in Ghana lo portò a riformulare la sua idea di nazionalismo nero, uno dei capisaldi del suo pensiero post-Nation of Islam.

Dopo due settimane in Africa, Malcolm X tornò in America. Il terzo capitolo apre con l'analisi delle sue dichiarazioni al ritorno dal viaggio, in un periodo di fondamentale importanza per la comprensione e valutazione dei due mesi precedenti (ma anche di quelli successivi).

Prima di ripartire una seconda volta in luglio, infatti, Malcolm X concesse numerose interviste e pronunciò discorsi nei quali chiarì gli effetti che la sua recente esperienza aveva avuto nel modificare alcune delle sue precedenti convinzioni: innanzitutto, specificò che ciò che vide all'estero non lo cambiò, bensì allargò i suoi orizzonti, una dichiarazione molto significativa che dimostra come non ci fu un definitivo rinnegamento del suo passato, contrariamente a quanto ritenuto da parte della letteratura. Riguardo la rivelazione a La Mecca, Malcolm X deluse chi sperava in un nuovo approccio che lo avvicinasse a Martin Luther King: sottolineando l'importanza che l'esperienza ebbe sul piano spirituale e personale, Malcolm X chiarì che i principi di fratellanza musulmani erano inapplicabili in una società dove il razzismo faceva parte del subconscio collettivo.

Altri argomenti discussi in questa prima fase includono l'enfasi sulla necessità di ripristinare l'identità culturale e l'orgoglio della propria nerezza perduti dagli afroamericani, la fondazione dell'Organizzazione per l'unità afroamericana (un'organizzazione laica ispirata alla Organizzazione dell'unità africana, creata l'anno precedente da trentuno paesi africani per promuoverne la solidarietà e cooperazione) e le sempre più aspre e dirette denunce contro Elijah Muhammad. In parte a causa della risposta minacciosa a queste critiche, Malcolm X tornò all'estero in luglio, dove iniziò un lungo soggiorno meno significativo del primo in termini di rivalutazioni ideologiche ma estremamente rilevante per quanto riguarda la missione politica. In rappresentanza dell'Organizzazione per l'unità afroamericana, infatti, Malcolm X partecipò a numerosi summit nei quali cercò alleati tra i leader mediorientali e africani per portare la violazione dei diritti umani in America di fronte alle Nazioni Unite, scavalcando quindi la giurisdizione americana che da sempre si era dimostrata incapace di garantire tali diritti alla popolazione afroamericana. La risposta fu tiepida ma non irrilevante, come dimostra il fatto che le agenzie statunitensi dimostrarono grande preoccupazione per l'azione di screditamento operata da Malcolm X in territori chiave per l'equilibrio geopolitico degli anni Sessanta.

Stremato dalla missione e dalla costante sorveglianza a cui venne sottoposto, Malcolm X concluse il secondo tour del 1964 con una breve tappa europea. Il quarto capitolo discute questa e altre due brevi visite in Europa che ebbero luogo tra novembre 1964 e febbraio 1965: in generale, non si trattò di esperienze che influenzarono marcatamente il pensiero di Malcolm X, quanto piuttosto rappresentarono occasioni nelle quali poté esprimere le sue ultime riflessioni. Viene prestata particolare attenzione al dibattito che ebbe luogo a Oxford Union e a un discorso pronunciato alla London School of Economics, ma il capitolo include anche una serie di

interventi tenuti in America tra un viaggio e l'altro: in questo ultimo periodo, Malcolm X ebbe modo di chiarire la relazione tra fede e obiettivi politici e di mostrare una criticità più accesa che mai nei confronti dei sotterfugi usati dai policy makers americani in Africa, come dimostrato dai frequenti riferimenti alla crisi congolese.

La presente analisi conclude che nel contesto dell'ultimo anno di vita di Malcolm X, il viaggio fu un aspetto fondamentale nella sua evoluzione ideologica. Tuttavia, questa importanza viene leggermente ridimensionata rispetto a quanto riportato dalla maggior parte degli autori che negli anni hanno tentato di spiegare tale crescita: analizzando l'*Autobiografia* assieme a interviste, discorsi, diari e racconti dell'ultimo anno emerge come i viaggi rappresentarono esperienze rivelatrici soprattutto dal punto di vista spirituale (tenendo presente però che Malcolm X comprendeva l'Islam come una religione funzionale alla lotta contro il razzismo e per i diritti degli afroamericani); sul piano politico, invece, i viaggi furono sì importanti ma non ideologicamente rivoluzionari, dato che l'analisi di alcune dichiarazioni precedenti alla separazione dalla Nation of Islam dimostra come Malcolm X stesse pensando in termini internazionali già prima degli anni Sessanta.

INTRODUCTION

More than half a century after his assassination, Malcolm X remains a popular but controversial figure, glorified by some for its contribution to the recovery of African Americans' positive self-image and disparaged by others as a violent and racist demagogue. Over the years, the combination of these positive and negative opinions elevated Malcolm X to icon status, especially in Black Culture. A crucial role in this development has been played by the autobiography written in collaboration with Alex Haley and published posthumously in late 1965: regarded by critics as a literary masterpiece, the book went on to inspire many generations, both that of Malcolm X's contemporaries and those of people who did not have the chance to appreciate him while he was still alive.[1] Barack Obama, the first African American President of the United States, belongs to this last group: only three years old when Malcolm X was gunned down at Harlem's Audubon Ballroom on February 21, 1965, he read the *Autobiography* in his teenage years and was profoundly struck by it. As Obama recalled in his memoir, *Dreams from My Father*, Malcolm X had a special influence on him in a period when he was deeply troubled by his own blackness and overall identity as an African American man:

> I gathered books from the library—Baldwin, Ellison, Hughes, Wright, DuBois. At night I would close the door to my room […] and there I would sit and wrestle with words, locked in suddenly desperate argument, trying to reconcile the world as I had found it with the terms of my birth. But there was no escape to be had. In every page of every book, […] I kept finding the same anguish, the same doubt; a self-contempt that neither irony nor intellect seemed able to deflect. […] Only Malcolm X's autobiography seemed to offer something different. His repeated acts of self-creation spoke to me; the blunt poetry of his words, his

[1] As evidence of the success and the perennial popularity of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the book sold millions of copies in the United States alone and, in 2011, it was named one of the best nonfiction books of the 20th century by the American magazine *Time* (Madison Gray, "All-TIME 100 Nonfiction Books," *Time*, August 17, 2011).

> unadorned insistence on respect, promised a new and uncompromising order, martial in its discipline, forged through sheer force of will. All the other stuff, the talk of blue-eyed devils and apocalypse, was incidental to that program, I decided, religious baggage that Malcolm himself seemed to have safely abandoned toward the end of his life.[2]

Obama was just one of countless people that in the last few decades have found inspiration in the words of Malcolm X, and it was not only because of their message about race consciousness: for instance, a reading of the Ten-Point Program of the Black Panther Party (founded in 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton "in the spirit of Malcolm X")[3] clearly shows how the American revolutionary organization drew from his ideas about education in black history, denunciation of police brutality, self-defense and control over the black communities.[4] To cite a more recent example, which involves a totally different geographical and ideological context, in 2003 the Arab European League of Belgium adopted Malcolm X's motto "by any means necessary" to express the way they would strive for the recognition of the Muslims' rights in Europe.[5]

In addition to the immortal *Autobiography* and an ever-growing biographical literature, the 1992 award-winning movie *Malcolm X* by Spike Lee and other programs such as the recent Netflix documentaries *Who Killed Malcolm X?* (2020) and *Blood Brothers: Malcolm X & Muhammad Ali* (2021) have contributed to keep his legacy alive to these days; yet despite these renowned sources, there remains an underlying confusion about who Malcolm X really was. George Breitman, who edited many of Malcolm X's works, tried to explain the origin of this problem:

> [W]hat [writers] do is chop Malcolm up, keeping the parts they like, the parts it suits their purposes to remember, and discarding as unimportant or irrelevant the other parts, where they do not deny their existence altogether. This attempt to

[2] Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, Three Rivers Press, New York 2006, pp. 85-86.

[3] David Hilliard and Donald Weise, eds., *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, Seven Stories Press, New York 2002, p. 51.

[4] Hilliard and Weise, *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, pp. 55-56.

[5] Les Payne and Tamara Payne, *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X*, Liveright Publishing Corporation, New York 2020, p. 517.

> preserve only part of Malcolm, the part they find useful, while ignoring or denying the other parts that are needed if you want to see the real Malcolm, the whole Malcolm, is of course bound to result in myths, even if they are presented in the name of opposing myths.[6]

This statement is especially true with regard to the last year of Malcolm X's life, which has been subject to much speculation being a period of rapid and complex ideological growth: in the twelve months that preceded his assassination, Malcolm X parted ways with the Nation of Islam (to which he had dedicated the past twelve years of his life) and set off on multiple journeys that brought him to Africa, Europe and the Middle East, meaning that he spent most of the little time he had left outside the United States. During this period abroad, Malcolm X met people from diverse countries, religions, and cultures that, as he liked to say, broadened his scope. The revaluation of some of the convictions he had held and preached for a long time resulted also in a general disorientation of his African American followers and the American press, which in turn contributed to leave historians a great deal of subjective and often inaccurate interpretations of his late thought.

A further complication in the study of Malcolm X is linked to the fact that its most indispensable source, the *Autobiography*, was initially conceived as a story of redemption guided by the Nation of Islam and an ode to its leader, Elijah Muhammad, but its drafting ended while Malcolm X was receiving incessant death threats from the same organization.[7] Therefore, the changing narrative of the book demands an attentive and critical reading that, seeing the general inability to appreciate Malcolm X as a complex and evolving thinker, appears not to have been the common approach by many of its readers.

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[6] George Breitman and Albert B. Cleage, *Myths About Malcolm X: Two Views*, Merit Publishers, New York 1968, p. 16.

[7] At the beginning of their collaboration, Malcolm X demanded that the proceeds from the book's sales would go entirely to the Nation of Islam and that the dedication was to be the following: "This book I dedicate to The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, who found me here in America in the muck and mire of the filthiest civilization and society on this earth, and pulled me out, cleaned me up and stood me on my feet, and made me the man that I am today" (Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Ballantine Books, New York 1973, p. 387). In his last days, instead, Malcolm X was calling Elijah Muhammad an immoral, old, and dogmatic man who was "too proud to confess to his followers […] that he [had] deliberately taught them falsehood" (L. Payne and T. Payne, *The Dead Are Arising*, p. 531). It is no accident that Malcolm X eventually wondered: "How is it possible to write one's autobiography in a world so fast-changing as this?" (Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 408).

In light of all the previously mentioned shortcomings of the literature on "the angriest black man in America,"[8] this thesis seeks to elucidate the ideological development of Malcolm X. In particular, the focus is on the last year of his life (March 1964 to February 1965) and, even more specifically, on the trips to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe that, except for a few interludes in America, started in April and ended less than ten days before his death. Despite there is no shortage of works addressing Malcolm X's last year, scholars have tended to focus on either the spiritual or the political transformation he underwent in foreign countries: instead, this work pays particular attention to race consciousness and the subject of race relations in analyzing the significance travels had in Malcolm X's ideology. Nonetheless, keeping in mind the previous quotation from Breitman and the American sociologist Misagh Parsa's warning not to examine ideologies independently from the historical and social context in which they emerge,[9] this thesis does not limit the study of Malcolm X exclusively to the issue of race in the last year of his life, but combines it with his changing political and religious thoughts.

To this end, the research has been conducted on the basis of a diverse collection of sources, which includes the *Autobiography*, multiple other biographical works, Malcolm X's speeches and interviews, his travel journal, archives of American newspapers and a wide range of critical studies. With regard to the structure of the thesis, the opening chapter offers an overview of Malcolm X's troubled youth, the resulting period in prison and the twelve years spent in service of Elijah Muhammad and his organization; the second chapter deals with the first few months after the split with the Nation of Islam, which consist of a period spent in the United States and the following departure for Mecca to start the first international travel of 1964 (but not the first ever: as it is discussed in the first section of the chapter, five years prior he had made a trip overseas as an emissary of Elijah Muhammad); the third chapter starts with the return to America in late May 1964, where Malcolm X spent a little more than a month presenting his new insights, founding a secular organization and planning a second, longer trip abroad, which is analyzed in its entirety; finally, the fourth and last chapter focuses on three European sojourns that occurred from November 1964 and February 1965.

[8] Malcolm X referred to himself with this appellation, echoing the accusations of the press against him (Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 397).

[9] James Tyner, *The Geography of Malcolm X: Black Radicalism and the Remaking of American Space*, Routledge, London 2005, p. 88.

Chapter 1

MALCOLM X IN THE UNITED STATES

Because Malcolm X lived what the American historian Manning Marable called "a life of reinvention,"[10] it can be useful to provide a brief recap of its main phases at the start of this thesis. Since the biographical literature on Malcolm X is particularly vast, the goal of this chapter is not to offer a thorough analysis of his life, but rather to highlight its key moments so as to frame Malcolm X's ideological development, especially in terms of race consciousness and race relations.

Before the X

Malcolm Little was born on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska. He was the fourth child of Earl Little Sr. and Louise Langdon Norton: the two met in Montreal, after Earl abandoned his first family in Georgia to join the Great Migration and Louise arrived in the Canadian city from the island of Grenada, in the British West Indies.[11] Malcolm X described his father as "a very black man,"[12] while his mother "looked like a white woman."[13] Louise's light complexion was due to the fact that her black mother got pregnant after being raped by a white man; because of this, Malcolm X later blamed his grandfather and the "white rapist's blood" he inherited from

[10] The reference is to Marable's book "*Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*," a highly successful and equally contested biography that earned him the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for History.

[11] At nineteen, Earl married a woman named Daisy Mason, with whom he had three children. Among the reasons motivating his choice to leave his family behind, Manning Marable cited the tension with the local whites, who "resented his air of independence," and with his wife's family. Furthermore, it is worth noting that during the late Nineteenth century and the early Twentieth century Earl's hometown of Reynolds, Georgia, was far from being a safe place for a black man: indeed, it was one of the Southern cities that counted the most lynching deaths among African Americans (Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, Viking, New York 2011, pp. 15-16).

[12] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 1-2.

[13] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 2.

him for the light color of his skin and his reddish hair, which in his youth earned him the nickname "Red."[14]

In analyzing through a racial lens his parents' behavior toward him during childhood, Malcolm X justified the preferential treatment he received from his father by explaining that Earl, despite an anti-white stance that was not up for debate, behaved in a way that was subconsciously affected by skin complexions: Malcolm X was the lighter-skinned family member and, compared to his siblings, he was rarely beaten by his father; in his mind, this was because "the white man's brainwashing of Negroes" during the slavery era created a predisposition for black parents to "almost instinctively treat any lighter children better than they did the darker ones."[15] Louise's actions, however, escaped this logic: maybe because of a self-consciousness shaped by the light skin color she was ashamed of, Malcolm X reflected, "She went out of her way never to let [him] become afflicted with a sense of color-superiority."[16] A form of self-hate (or at least embarrassment) explained, according to Malcolm X, why his mother's punishments toward him were harsher than those received by his siblings.

Fervent supporters of Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X's parents were actively involved in the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the Garveyite organization where Earl was a Baptist minister and Louise worked as a reporter.[17] Put in charge of opening new branches for the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the Littles moved first to Philadelphia and then to Omaha, where they were targeted by the Ku Klux Klan due to Earl's activism inside the black community. Numerous threats from local white supremacist groups during the early years of their marriage forced the couple to move to Milwaukee, East Chicago, and finally Lansing, in Michigan.

On September 8, 1931, two years after settling in Michigan, Malcolm X's father suffered fatal wounds after being ran over by a streetcar. The local police officially ruled his death accidental, ignoring the possibility that what had occurred was a racially motivated murder. It is more likely, however, that Earl's death was caused by the local racist whites' violence: Malcolm X remembered that at the time "there had been a lot of tension around the house

[14] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 2.
[15] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 4.
[16] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 8.
[17] Ted Vincent, "The Garveyite Parents of Malcolm X," *The Black Scholar*, XX, 2 (1989), pp. 10-13, pp. 10-11.

because of the Black Legion threats."[18] Moreover, the site of the accident did not line up with where Earl was supposed to be that evening: indeed, he left home telling he was headed toward North Lansing, while his body was found a block east of the city limits, in a predominantly white area.[19] Overall, there is compelling evidence suggesting that Earl did not accidentally slip under the streetcar's rear wheels in an attempt to get back on board of the moving vehicle where he had supposedly left his coat, as the local newspaper reported the next day:[20] what is more likely is that Earl was first assaulted and then put on the streetcar tracks in order to simulate an accident.

In general, at age six Malcolm X had already experienced multiple episodes of racist threats and also proper attacks: in 1929, for example, two white men set his house on fire in the middle of the night while the whole family was asleep. Malcolm X was not the only member of the family to be tormented by these events: the trauma caused by the assassination of her husband, the difficult economic condition of the household following Earl's death (without him, the family lost its main source of income right in the midst of the Great Depression), the tense relationship with Michigan's welfare department and the threat of the authorities to separate her from her eight children degenerated Louise's mental health, to the point that in 1939 she entered a mental institution, in which she spent the next twenty-four years of her life.[21]

Deprived of their parents, the Little siblings were divided. Malcolm X was assigned to a local family and then, once he turned fourteen, to the Ingham County Juvenile Home in Mason, Michigan. Here, in an almost exclusively white town, Malcolm X became increasingly aware of the social distance that separated him from white people.[22] With this regard, it is quite revealing the episode that took place at Mason Junior High School, where after the young Malcolm X had expressed his ambition to become a lawyer, the English teacher warned him:

> Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Do not misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you have got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer, that is no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to

[18] The Black Legion was a particularly vicious white supremacist organization active primarily in the Midwest during the Thirties (Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 9).

[19] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 31.

[20] "Man Run Over By Street Car," *Lansing State Journal*, September 28, 1931.

[21] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 36.

[22] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 38.

> think about something you can be. You are good with your hands, making things. […] Why do not you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person, you will get all kinds of work.[23]

This interaction marked a first turning point in Malcolm X's race consciousness and, in turn, in the way he interacted with people on the basis of their complexion: as Malcolm X later wrote in the *Autobiography*, "It was then that I began to change, inside."[24] He distanced himself from white people once he realized that his complexion was what ultimately defined him in their eyes:

> I realized that whatever I was not, I was smarter than nearly all of those white kids [here Malcolm X refers to his white classmates who, contrary to him, were encouraged by the teacher to pursue whatever career plan they had]. But apparently I was still not intelligent enough […] to become whatever I wanted to be.[25]

Malcolm X wanted out of Michigan, and it would not be long before his living situation changed again as in February 1941 his half-sister Ella (the oldest of the three children Earl had during his previous marriage) invited him to live in Roxbury, Boston; what is more, she also took official custody of him. Malcolm X had visited the city a year before, when he was surprised to notice that in Boston interracial couples walked together "without obvious fear."[26] Despite being only fifteen at the time he arrived in Massachusetts, Malcolm X appeared and behaved like a much older man, so, after leaving school, he was able to apply for jobs without raising much suspicion. In the next couple of years, he worked as shoeshine, beverage seller, waiter, and fourth-class cook at a railway company.[27]

It was during this period that Malcolm X discovered the black subculture and started going down a dangerous path in life: away from his siblings and in the absence of a paternal figure, Malcolm X started modelling himself after black people that animated Boston's ghetto. Not

[23] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 36.
[24] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 37.
[25] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 37.
[26] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 37.
[27] George Breitman, *Malcolm X: L'uomo e le idee*, Massari editore, Bolsena 2015, p. 9.

even Ella could be considered a positive influence: although in Malcolm X's account she is remembered as "the first really proud black woman [he] had ever seen in [his] life" and "a commanding woman,"[28] the *Autobiography* fails to address her violent demeanor and her frequent troubles with the law, which caused her numerous arrests.[29]

Malcolm X soon embraced the clandestine activities and the fashionable clothing style of the ghetto not only as symbols of transgression, but also as means to hide his rural background that, in his eyes, prevented him from achieving social acceptance in the new, bigger, and vibrant city.[30] By taking part in Boston's urban community he quickly "learned all about smoking marijuana cigarettes, hustling, petty thievery, and seducing fast women,"[31] wore zoot suits and conked his hair for the first time. This last practice is particularly interesting in light of his later reflections: by enduring excruciating pain just to have his hair straightened like that of a white man, implicitly acknowledging the appeal of that hairstyle naturally reserved to whites, Malcolm X made what he later defined as the "first really big step toward self-degradation."[32]

At this point of his life, it is difficult to see a marked black pride in Malcolm X,[33] and yet his experiences as a rebellious black teenager rejecting social rules laid the foundation for the refined race consciousness that emerged later on. For instance, wearing a zoot suit in a black urban community should not be interpreted simply as a stylistic choice: whether Malcolm X was fully aware of it or he just wore it to by trendy, it is generally held that in the Thirties and early Forties this particular uniform symbolized "an act of defiance against white standards of behaviour"[34] and, most importantly, it represented a way through which the African American population could embrace blackness as a distinctive trait. As the American historian Robin D. G. Kelley pointed out,

> Seeing oneself and others "dressed up" was enormously important in terms of constructing a collective identity based on something other than wage work,

[28] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 32-33.

[29] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 40.

[30] Robin D. G. Kelley, "The Riddle of the Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics During World War II," in Joe Wood, *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*, Anchor Books, New York 1994, pp. 155-182, p. 156.

[31] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 43.

[32] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 54.

[33] Breitman, *Malcolm X: L'uomo e le idee*, p. 9.

[34] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 61.

> presenting a public challenge to the dominant stereotypes of the black body, and reinforcing a sense of dignity that was perpetually being assaulted.[35]

Overall, Malcolm X made a "fascinating but destructive detour on the road to self-consciousness and political enlightenment" in his relatively short Boston's sojourn.[36] This deflection, as will be shown later, was not limited to his stay in the capital of Massachusetts: indeed, it would take an even darker turn when he discovered New York's street life in the early Forties.

At sixteen, Malcolm X took a railroad job that allowed him to travel all over the Northeast and, most notably, to finally visit Harlem. He had heard a lot about the "Black Mecca," and once he got there his high expectations were not disappointed: "In one night," he remembered in the *Autobiography*, "New York had just narcotized me."[37] For approximatively a year, Malcolm X served food and beverages to the trains' passengers (while also trafficking marijuana on the side), taking advantage of the overnight halt to visit the cities he was in. Marable underlined how "the experiences on the railroad began Malcolm's affair with travel itself, the excitement and adventure of encountering new cities and different people."[38] The theme of travel, therefore, was already of great importance for the teenage Malcolm X, that is more than twenty years before his life-changing international experiences in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe.

The fact that this job allowed him to travel for free did not refrain some of Malcolm X's acts of defiance, such as cursing white passengers and going to work under the influence of drugs. Despite World War II deprived a great share of the workforce, making it challenging for many companies to find suitable workers available, he was fired as a consequence of his inappropriate conduct. Now unemployed, Malcolm X chose to live in Harlem, where he moved in 1942 and where illegal hustles became more and more central in his life. In New York, he initially found job as a waiter, but it did not take long before Malcolm X (or, as he started to be called, "Detroit Red")[39] entered Harlem's circle of pimps, drug dealers and crooks, soon

[35] Kelley, "The Riddle of the Zoot," p. 163.

[36] Kelley, "The Riddle of the Zoot," p. 156.

[37] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 75.

[38] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 50.

[39] Malcolm X worked at a place where there was another red-haired black man, so to distinguish the two they started being called by their hometowns' names. Because no one knew of Lansing, Malcolm X was associated with the nearby city of Detroit (Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 52).

becoming a full-time hustler himself.[40] He later identified this period as the one in which he quitted working regular jobs to pursue the criminal path.[41]

Malcolm X's recollection of these times was straightforward: "I was a true hustler, uneducated, unskilled at anything honourable, and I considered myself nervy and cunning enough to live by my wits, exploiting any prey that present itself. I would risk just about anything."[42] In addition, Malcolm X started using narcotics and committing robberies, leading to a serious drug addiction and frequent troubles with the law, to the point that in August 1945 it was issued a warrant for his arrest. Malcolm X moved around the Northeastern states trying to escape the law and the enemies he had made in the streets of Harlem, but he did not give up on his criminal activities. Eventually, he would pay the price for it: in January 1946, Malcolm X was arrested for burglary and weapons possession, which earned him a sentence of ten years in prison.

The Years in Prison

It is widely held that these years behind bars (which contrary to the initial sentence ended up being six and a half) marked the most notable turning point in Malcolm X's life: indeed, this was the period in which he discovered the Nation of Islam, a black religious organization that gave purpose to his existence.

Malcolm X entered the Charlestown State Prison in February 1946. The first year he was detained in this facility did not suggest that he could ever leave his past behind: far from having a religious epiphany, Malcolm X maintained his drug habits using nutmeg as a substitute of the substances he had previously abused and, adding to a number of nicknames he was given in his youth, he began to be called "Satan" because of his constant cursing against the Bible and God.[43] So overall, this was not yet a year of great changes: Malcolm X recalled that this period "runs all together in a memory of nutmeg and the other semi-drugs, of cursing guards, throwing

[40] Kelley, "The Riddle of the Zoot," p. 168.

[41] Marable, however, pointed out that despite Malcolm X's declaration, there is evidence suggesting that his claim was at least exaggerated: for instance, Malcolm X started working at the nightclub Small's Paradise in 1943, despite he said that 1942 was the year in which he stopped pursuing wage labor. Malcolm X's goal here was probably to dramatize his shift toward criminality, which in reality was not as definitive as he wished people would believe (Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 51).

[42] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 108.

[43] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 153.

things out of my cell, balking in the lines, dropping my tray in the dining hall, refusing to answer my number and things like that."[44]

Two elements in particular stand out when attempting to find signs of a new man in Malcolm X's early years in prison: the choice to educate himself and the discovery of the Nation of Islam. Not surprisingly, the theme of blackness is key to understand both these factors: for the former, Malcolm X was deeply inspired by a fellow inmate called "Bimbi,"[45] a knowledgeable black man who earned respect in prison through his outstanding intelligence and charisma. Malcolm X was fascinated by his intellectual superiority and his ability to show leadership through the use of words rather than violence or rebellion, which made him an inspiring and positive black role model, someone Malcolm X was not used to see in the underworlds of Boston and New York.[46] Because of the influence of Bimbi, who encouraged him not to waste his brilliant mind, Malcolm X found a renewed interest in education:[47] in Charlestown he started following a correspondence course and visiting the prison's library, but the most significant personal development would occur in March 1948, when he was transferred to the Norfolk Prison Colony, an experimental rehabilitation facility where inmates were encouraged to participate in educational activities. Here, Malcolm X flourished intellectually and as a debater.

As for the second key element related to the prison years, the introduction to the Nation of Islam (henceforth also referred to as "Nation"), it all started from Malcolm X's siblings: beginning in 1948, he received several letters and visits from his family members, who introduced him to an unorthodox Islamic movement born in the early Thirties that they all had already joined and that in their opinion preached "the natural religion for the black man."[48] The Littles were drawn to the Nation mostly because it was a black-only movement that aimed at improving the conditions of the African American population rather than being strictly a religious community focused on spirituality.[49]

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[44] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 153.

[45] Bimbi, whose real name was John Elton Bemby, was a "tall, light-complexioned former burglar" around forty years old. Maybe with an overstatement, but nonetheless indicative of his importance, Marable referred to him as the man who changed Malcolm X's life (Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 73).

[46] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 154.

[47] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 154.

[48] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 155.

[49] Louis A. DeCaro, *On the Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X*, New York University Press, New York 1996, p. 79.

To summarize the creed of the movement, the followers of the Nation believed that God (that is, Allah) was black and the original population of the Earth was black as well. The appearance of an unnatural and demonic race, that of white people, was the result of an evil experiment conducted by a scientist named Yacub, a man born to bring chaos. An ancient prophecy held that the white race would dominate for six thousand years, until Allah would reappear on Earth, leading the black people to take back the power from the "white devils."[50] This parable was conceived by Wallace D. Fard, the founder of the Nation and predecessor of Robert Pool, better known with the Muslim name Elijah Muhammad. As a self-proclaimed "Messenger of Allah," Elijah Muhammad took the leadership of the movement in 1934 and carried on the rhetoric of the "devil white man," who was responsible for brainwashing black people into subjugation, leading to the loss of their original identity and self-pride: according to Elijah Muhammad's preaching, white people "cut these black people off from all knowledge of their own kind, and cut them off from any knowledge of their own language, religion and past culture."[51] Christianity too was to be firmly blamed for the negative race consciousness that African Americans had developed throughout the years, as it set out that "black was a curse," a color inherently inferior to whiteness and something the black man should be ashamed of.[52]

Initially doubtful of the Nation's legitimacy and somewhat hesitant to join his siblings' new cult, Malcolm X approached this religious movement by embracing a few Muslim restrictions, such as refusing to smoke and to eat pork; however, the more he learned about the Nation's racial principles, the more he got closer to faith. What would eventually win him over to fully embrace the Nation was the fact that these racial principles rejecting black inferiority and identifying white men as diabolical beings perfectly resonated with his life experiences: as Malcolm X admitted, "The first time I heard the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's statement, 'The white man is the devil,' it just clicked."[53] Reflecting on all the major relationships he had with white people in his life (the white supremacists who burnt his house to the ground and killed his father, the white people from the social welfare system who separated his family and

[50] Luconi Stefano, *Gli afro-americani: Quattro secoli di storia*, Cooperativa Libraria Editrice Università di Padova, Padua 2015, pp. 281-282.

[51] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 162.

[52] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 163.

[53] Lawrence B. Goodheart, "The Odyssey of Malcolm X: An Eriksonian Interpretation," *The Historian*, LIII, 1 (1990), pp. 47-62, p. 54.

institutionalized his mother, the white teacher who discouraged him from pursuing a career in law, the white policemen who constantly tried to arrest him in Harlem, the white judge who sentenced him to ten years in prison, etc.) and supported by the reading of books that disclosed the glorious African history,[54] Elijah Muhammad's message of black racial pride and anti-whiteness eventually persuaded Malcolm X, who became more and more convinced of the validity of the Nation as a movement supporting racial separation in American society.[55] As explained by the American theologist Louis A. DeCaro,

> The Nation appealed to his personal motives and goals, allowing him to reorder his life on a number of levels while, for the first time, fusing his personal religious sense with his black consciousness. The Nation social base was not only appealing to Malcolm, but it was quite familiar, since Muhammad's teachings, like Garvey's ideas, were fundamentally designed to affirm the black identity.[56]

Once he fully accepted the Nation, Malcolm X's life was radically transformed. Talking about the spiritual epiphany occurred in prison, he later admitted: "Islam meant more to me than anything I ever had known in my life. Islam and Mr. Elijah Muhammad had changed my whole world."[57]

While still incarcerated, Malcolm X started praying, exchanging letters regularly with Elijah Muhammad, participating to discussion groups so to enhance his public speaking skills and studying not just for the sake of knowledge but rather "with the intent of affirming the teachings of Elijah Muhammad."[58] In a way, Malcolm X's intellectual and religious awakenings intertwined during the prison years, as his newly-found faith gave him a purpose in life (that is, serving the Nation in its black struggle or, said differently, the African American struggle for liberation and equality), and in turn this mission empowered and directed his education.[59]

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[54] Goodheart, "The Odyssey of Malcolm X," p. 174

[55] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 89.

[56] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 84.

[57] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 186.

[58] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 85.

[59] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 86.

Black Muslim

When in August 1952 Malcolm X was released on parole, his brother Wilfred welcomed him in his house in Detroit and found him a job at a department store. More importantly, Malcolm X began attending the local Nation's temple and visited the one in Chicago too, where he finally met Elijah Muhammad in person: in addition to the thrill he experienced in meeting the man regarded as the real "Messenger of Allah," Malcolm X was overwhelmed by the atmosphere at the temple, where, according to the accounts reported in the *Autobiography*, he witnessed for the first time a group of well-behaved and elegant black people proud of their blackness and who showed love to each other instead of jealousy and suspicion.[60]

Annoyed by the scarce membership in Detroit's temple, Malcolm X worked hard to recruit new followers among those "poor, ignorant, brain-washed black brothers" in which he probably saw his younger, uneducated, and purposeless self.[61] His proselytizing work was successful, as the membership to the Nation's temple of Detroit increased substantially.[62] This accomplishment did not go unnoticed in Chicago, where Elijah Muhammad and the Nation's headquarters were based: in the summer of 1953, Malcolm X became assistant minister at Detroit's temple; later, he was promoted to minister in Boston (in late 1953), then Philadelphia (in March 1954) and finally New York (in June 1954), at Harlem's Temple No. 7. Elijah Muhammad was pleased by Malcolm X's tireless devotion to the Nation's cause, so he also sent him preaching and establishing new temples across the United States. Accordingly, the membership continued to grow.

In the meantime, Malcolm X had dropped his last name, replacing it with a symbolic X. A key part of his identity, X served as a statement: by abandoning Little, he rejected "the white slave-master name […] which some blue-eyed devil […] had imposed upon [his] paternal forebears."[63] As a consequence, X underlined how the original African family name (which, on a deeper level, can be seen as the reflection of a person's true identity) has been forgotten, erased by the "devil white man" when he stripped the African people from their motherland and enslaved them, replacing their last names with his as a way to establish ownership. The

[60] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 186.

[61] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 102.

[62] Even though the growth of the Nation of Islam is difficult to track, Marable estimated that the membership in Detroit tripled in a matter of months (Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 102).

[63] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 199.

substitution of the last name with X was a common practice among the people who converted to the Islam predicated by the Nation and, according to Elijah Muhammad's teaching, it was to be maintained until Allah would return to Earth; then, he would be the one to assign Muslims a "holy name."[64]

While the Civil Rights Movement began to pick up the pace in the mid-Fifties, the Nation of Islam continued to grow both in the number of followers and in their social classes' heterogeneity: the approximately one thousand members of early 1953 had become almost six thousand two years later, a number that exploded to somewhere between fifty and seventy-five thousand in 1961.[65] During the early phases of Malcolm X's recruitment campaigns, the target had been predominantly the disillusioned African American at the fringes of society, who sought desperately a purpose and a message of salvation; then, by the second half of the Fifties, the audience of the Nation's temples began to comprise educated black people from the middle class as well.[66] It is commonly believed that behind this impulse there was the lack of confidence within part of the black population in the principle of integration pursued from the early stages of the civil rights struggle: the resistance to desegregation displayed by white people especially in the South proved to some that the Nation's support to racial separation in American society was not as unreasonable or extreme as it initially appeared, given the widespread perception that a good share of the white population was irredeemably opposed to the granting of equal rights to black people.[67]

At this point, the position of the Nation within the framework of the civil rights struggle needs at least a brief discussion: while its religious foundation is undeniable (even though it presented clear deviations from the orthodox Muslim doctrine), the Nation appeared primarily as an apolitical organization designed to guide a social movement which aimed at improving the socioeconomic condition of the black population in the United States, which, inside a predominantly white society, felt that the centuries-long exploitation its ancestors endured had to stop by any means necessary and without further delay. Instead of hoping one day to achieve justice and equality within this society, the Nation advocated territorial separation between white and black people as the best way for African Americans to overcome segregation, escape

[64] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 199.
[65] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 123.
[66] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 123.
[67] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 123.

oppression and regain dignity.[68] Furthermore, Elijah Muhammad taught that every member of the Nation should renounce American citizenship, because the black population had been transplanted forcefully in the United States and therefore its true nature was not American.[69]

In light of these positions, integration was never considered a viable solution to alleviate black people's problems in the United States by Malcolm X and the rest of the Nation's followers. To be fair, on practice the Nation never actually pursued the creation of a "black nation within the nation": as Elijah Muhammad once admitted, "[The American government] will never give us three or four states. That I probably know, but that does not hinder you and me from asking for it."[70] The alternative demand, as expressed in the Nation's program, was the recognition of equal justice and equal employment opportunities within the American territory.[71]

In the second half of the Fifties, Malcolm X was the most vocal representative of the Nation and, consequently, the main target of criticism when it came to some of its controversial stances: he progressively moved to the frontpage of the newspapers and became more and more recognizable to the white population who had known little or nothing about Elijah Muhammad's organization. In defining the fundamental moments of this period that brought him and the Nation into the national spotlight, two events stand out: the Johnson X's incident, which also marked the debut of Malcolm X as a civil rights leader, and the broadcast of the documentary "The Hate That Hate Produced."[72]

Johnson Hinton (or, according to his Muslim name, Johnson X) was a member of Harlem's Temple No. 7 who, on April 26, 1957, was brutally attacked by a cop following an altercation on the street of New York.[73] Instead of rushing him to the hospital, Johnson X was transported to the police station, where he suffered further beatings that left him seriously injured. Alerted of the situation, Malcolm X mobilized an enraged group of Muslims and Harlemites headed

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[68] It must be specified that what the Nation envisioned was primarily the creation of separate territories inside the United States, not necessarily a diaspora or mass emigration toward another state as other separatists such as Marcus Garvey had planned in the past (Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980*, Scarecrow Press, Metuchen 1980, p. 3).

[69] Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims*, p. 56.

[70] Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims*, p. 58.

[71] Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims*, p. 63.

[72] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 127.

[73] Apparently, the confrontation started when Johnson yelled "You are not in Alabama, this is New York!" to a policeman who was beating a black man. In response, the policeman first ordered him to walk away and then, when Johnson did not obey, approached him with malicious intents (Benjamin Goodman, *The End of White World Supremacy: Four Speeches*, Merlin House, New York 1971, p. 2).

toward the police department, where he demanded to check his fellow Muslim's conditions and, once he attested the urgent need of medical attention, to get him out of the cell directly to a hospital. As the crowd outside the police station grew in number and rage, the threat of confrontation pressured the policemen into agreeing to the requests. What emerged from this episode was the charismatic leadership of Malcolm X, who seemed capable of gathering and dispersing at will an angry crowd of black people, Muslims and not, ready for a confrontation. Indicative of this perception, a police officer admitted to a local newspaper that, referring to Malcolm X, "No man should have that much power."[74] This large mobilization captured much attention, making the Nation known to the general public and elevating Malcolm X to the status of "the most watched, and probably the most disturbing, black leader in New York City in the eyes of law enforcement officials."[75]

The second event was even more meaningful in terms of notoriety: the televised documentary "The Hate That Hate Produced" consisted of a sensationalized representation of the Nation and its members, establishing in the white population's common imaginary the organization of Elijah Muhammad as a hateful black supremacist group that rejected integration, attacked Christianity, and accused indiscriminately white people of being devils. Presented by the journalist Mike Wallace with the assistance of the African American writer Louis Lomax and broadcast nationwide in 1959, the documentary was received by the public with great alarm. DeCaro explained the reaction as follows:

> Since white society has always chosen to be fundamentally unfamiliar with black culture, the revelation of such an organization as the Nation was all the more shocking to whites. […] Without being aware of the state of the urban black community, and lacking an understanding of the history of black separation in the United State, most whites were jolted by the extensive film and coverage of Mr. Muhammad's Muslims.[76]

[74] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 128.
[75] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 113.
[76] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 133.

Notoriety, then, was accompanied by strong criticism coming from multiple segments of the American population, both white and black, which could not help but be shocked by the Nation's extreme view on race relations and its refusal to embrace racial integration.

Within this context, the spreading of the name "Black Muslims" to refer to the followers of Elijah Muhammad did not help in calming the critics: inspired by the title of the book *The Black Muslim in America* by C. Eric Lincoln, the name was not appreciated by the Malcolm X, who "tried for at least two years to kill [it] off."[77] He also elucidated his contempt for the term by declaring: "We are black *people* here in America. Our *religion* is Islam. We are properly called Muslim!"[78] With this statement, it can be argued that Malcolm X did not necessarily want to separate "Black" and "Muslim" as two defining aspects of a single identity; instead, it appears that he decided to stress the legitimacy of his religious faith in Islam, therefore avoiding the use of a term that would distinguish him and the other Nation's followers from different Muslim groups. But regardless of Malcolm X's disdain, the press made "Black Muslim" a common appellation not as a way to differentiate orthodox Muslims from Elijah Muhammad's Muslims (as Lincoln probably intended to do with his book), but rather with the goal of feeding the sensationalized commentary of the media that represented the Nation as a black supremacist group threatening the white American status quo.[79]

Paired with his presence at numerous debates and interviews, the national attention brought to the Nation in the late Fifties and early Sixties made Malcolm X the most recognizable representative of the Muslim organization: indeed, his incendiary sermons and excellent oratory abilities made him a more captivating leader than Elijah Muhammad, a soft-voiced and rudimentary public speaker that, moreover, had to come to terms with the fact that in front of a non-Muslim audience his mythical role as the "Messenger of Allah" was not enough to win the public over: outside the boundaries of the Nation's temples, in fact, he was just a man at the head of a religious organization, not a prophet. Moreover, Malcolm X was climbing the Nation's ranks, to the point that in 1959 he was appointed national spokesman, a position that, combined with the precarious health of Elijah Muhammad, further established him as a leading figure in the Nation. This is particularly important because it is in this period that the first divergences of views between Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad can be traced.

[77] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 247.
[78] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 247.
[79] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, pp. 155-156.

Split with the Nation of Islam

Many causes contributed to the initially just ideological and then official distancing of Malcolm X from the Nation. Among the main factors that pushed him out of the Muslim organization must be mentioned: the scandal linked to Elijah Muhammad's sexual misconduct and illegitimate children, which raised serious concerns about the actual morality and reliability of the spiritual leader; the resentment of the Nation's high ranks toward Malcolm X and his growing power within the organization that, in a period of declining health for Elijah Muhammad, threatened the family's inheritance of the Nation's leadership; the contrasting visions of Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad on how to respond to concrete issues affecting the black community (exemplified by the 1962 episode of police brutality occurred inside the Nation's temple in Los Angeles that left the Muslim secretary Ronald Stokes dead);[80] and finally what Malcolm X perceived as Muhammad's envy toward him due to his increasing popularity and superior intellectual and oratorical abilities, which made him a celebrity potentially capable of challenging his leadership role.[81]

The notorious comments Malcolm X made right after the American President John Fitzgerald Kennedy's death in late 1963 (which costed him a ninety-day suspension from representing the Nation, a punishment that would turn indefinite two months later) were thus just the final blow that made an already complicated relationship unsustainable.[82] For this reason, it would be an improper simplification to consider this event as the main cause of the

[80] The process for the killing of Stokes (for which the jury was composed entirely of white people) ended with the sentencing of eleven Nation's members for assault, while there were no criminal charges on the police side, as the homicide was judged "justifiable." Overwhelmed by rage, Malcolm X was starting to organize a raid against the Los Angeles Police Department when Elijah Muhammad blocked his plan for revenge, probably fearing some sort of retaliation against his organization. To Malcolm X, this refusal to defend the Nation's member and overall passivity with regard to the black struggle was incomprehensible and unjustifiable (Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, pp. 207-209).

[81] Archie C. Epps, "The Rhetoric of Malcolm X," *Harvard Review*, Winter, 3 (1993), pp. 64-75, p. 65. Malcolm X's impression is confirmed by a report of the British Embassy in Washington from the early Sixties, according to which, compared to Elijah Muhammad, he was a "better known, younger, sharper, more modern figure" (Ambar Saladin, *Malcolm X at Oxford Union: Racial Politics in a Global Era*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, pp. 7-8).

[82] Talking about the President in a speech on December 1, 1963, Malcolm X declared that his death was a case of "chickens coming home to roost." In the context of Kennedy's assassination, he used this old saying to express how white people should blame themselves for what happened to the American President, because his death was the result of the same unchecked and hateful violence that for centuries had had black people as target. According to Malcolm X, on November 22, 1963, the white American population experienced for the first time how it felt to be on the side of the victim.

break: its origin, in Marable's analysis, can be traced as far back as 1957, when the Johnson X's incident made Malcolm X realize that the apolitical, conservative, and inward-looking (in the sense that it only dealt with the black American community of Muslims) precepts of the Nation were not suited to address the daily struggles of all black people in the United States. Consequently, Malcolm X found himself at a crossroad: he would soon have to make a choice between remaining loyal to Elijah Muhammad and aligning himself with the entire black community, regardless of its people's religious faith.[83]

Despite his ideas about race, religion and politics were growing independent from the Nation's dogmas, the attachment Malcolm X had for Elijah Muhammad made it difficult for him to combine his enhanced consciousness with the messages he was expected to deliver as a spokesperson for the Nation. In 1965, just a few days prior to his death, Malcolm X acknowledged this dilemma: "I believed in Elijah Muhammad more strongly than Christians do in Jesus. I believed in him so strongly that my mind, my body, my voice functioned one hundred percent for him and the movement."[84] On the same occasion, looking back on his life, he also showed awareness about his past ideological restraints: "I feel like a man who has been asleep somewhat and under someone else's control. I feel what I am thinking and saying now is for myself. Before, it was for and by the guidance of Elijah Muhammad. Now I think with my own head."[85]

So eventually, as it will be discussed in detail in the next chapters when dealing with the last year of his life and the international experience, Malcolm X parted ways with the Nation and its non-engagement policy in order to be able to play a more active role in the American black struggle during the first half of the Sixties: as a member of the Nation, he could only denounce the flaws of American society, but now he wanted to pass from propaganda to action. After twelve years of loyal and relentless service, Malcolm X was finally able "to muster the nerve, and the strength, to start facing the facts."[86]

It does not follow that Malcolm X sought to erase or even minimize his past accomplishments once he decided to separate from the Nation. Reflecting on the subject of race

[83] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 129.

[84] Theodore Jones, "Malcolm Knew He Was a 'Marked Man': Victim Predicted His Own Slaying," *New York Times*, February 22, 1965, p. 1.

[85] Jones, "Malcolm Knew He Was a 'Marked Man,'" p. 2.

[86] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 306.

consciousness and race relations, Malcolm X recognized his important contribution as a Black Muslim:

> I had helped Mr. Muhammad and his other ministers to revolutionize the American black man's thinking, opening his eyes until he would never again look in the same fearful, worshipful way the white man. I had participated in spreading the truths that had done so much to help the American black man rid himself of the mirage that the white race was made up of "superior" beings. I had been a part of the tapping of something in the black secret soul.[87]

Despite such a clear awareness of how important the Nation's platform had been for him in pursuing the American black struggle, Malcolm X realized very soon that there was no margin for reconciliation with the Nation: adding to the already mentioned ideological differences and the removal from all the positions he held inside the organization, the discovery that the Nation's officials were planning his assassination and signed the definitive "psychological divorce."[88] Months before the comments against President Kennedy that led to the ninety-day suspension, Elijah Muhammad had confessed in private his presentiment that, once out of the Nation, Malcolm X would turn against him.[89] When this premonition began to spread among the Black Muslims, Malcolm X became a collective enemy who deserved punishment, to the point that the most intrepid followers of Muhammad started seeking permission to eliminate him.

It did not take long before Malcolm X realized he was about to be in serious danger: the combination of the Black Muslims' complete devoutness to Elijah and the aggressive rhetoric of the organization (which he had helped create in the previous twelve years) convinced him that something tragic could happen at any moment. Malcolm X knew that "hating [him] was going to become the cause for people to shattered faith to rally around" and that "no one would kill you quicker than a Muslim if he felt that is what Allah wanted him to do."[90] To avoid compromising even further his situation, Malcolm X's approach to public speeches remained cautious throughout the period of the split: for instance, during a post-suspension interview in

[87] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 289.
[88] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 309.
[89] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 233.
[90] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 316.

late 1963 with the journalist Louis Lomax, Malcolm X kept referring to Elijah Muhammad as "Honourable" and "The Messenger," stressing how there could be no contrasts between them because, as he declared using submissive terms, "I am his slave, his servant, his son. He is the leader, the only spokesman for the Black Muslims."[91] Right after, however, Malcolm X felt the need to hint that some changes were needed for the good of the black struggle:

> I will tell you this: The Messenger has seen God. He was with Allah and was given divine patience with the devil. He is willing to wait for Allah to deal with this devil. Well, sir, the rest of us Black Muslims have not seen God, we do not have this gift of divine patience with the devil. The younger Black Muslims want to see some action.[92]

Malcolm X's mature ideology and independent views could not be restrained any longer, even in front of such a delicate personal situation: he needed to assume a militant role that would allow him to be active in the realm of politics, something impossible if he kept "actively subordinating himself to the discourse of the Nation of Islam."[93] In March 1964, Malcolm X abandoned every hope for reconciliation, formally left the organization and announced the founding of an alternative Islamic group, the Muslim Mosque Incorporated. It was conceived as an organization that "would help to challenge the American black man to gain his human rights, and to cure his mental, spiritual, economic, and political sickness," that "would differ from the Nation of Islam in that it would embrace all faiths of black man, and it would carry into practice what the Nation of Islam had only preached."[94] The action program of the Muslim Mosque Inc. envisioned an active participation in the economic, political, and social spheres of the American Americans' life. Although this was a clear departure from what Malcolm X was allowed to pursue as a member of the Nation, the ultimate goal remained the same: "Help to cure the black man in North America of the sickness which he has kept under the white man's heel."[95]

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[91] Louis E. Lomax, *When the Word Is Given: A Report on Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and the Black Muslim World*, Greenwood Press, Westport 1979, p. 191.

[92] Lomax, *When the Word Is Given*, p. 191.

[93] Alex Gillespie, "Malcolm X and His Autobiography: Identity Development and Self-narration," *Culture & Psychology*, XI, 1 (2005), pp. 77-88, p. 84.

[94] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 315.

[95] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 312.

To conclude, entering the last year of his life, what can be said about the evolution of Malcolm X's racial thought during the period in which he progressively parted ways with the Nation? There is not much evidence suggesting that his departure from the organization of Elijah Muhammad was followed by a sudden revaluation of all the racial principles it had taught to him. Multiple signals of Malcolm X's distancing from the Nation's view about this subject can in fact be found all throughout the previous few years. For this reason, rather than claiming that this change opened his eyes, it would be fairer to state that this new independence put him in the conditions to develop old ideas in autonomy and with a critical approach that was previously prevented by Elijah Muhammad's conservative stance.

An instance of Malcolm X's earlier divergence from dogmas concerning race can be found in the speech he gave at Michigan State University on January 23, 1963, when he claimed that the American black man came from Africa and that he had maintained cultural ties with the continent, while the Nation's creed established that the origins of the African American population must be searched in Asia, as their ancestor was the Middle eastern tribe of Shabazz.[96] Another example is in the words pronounced at the University of Rochester on January 28, 1963, where Malcolm X affirmed that if the black man was allowed to "speak as an American" there would not be a race problem, a declaration that, in a way, suggests an opening to the idea of promoting equality inside American society instead of preaching racial separation to progress in the black struggle.[97] Lastly, during an interview on June 4, 1963, Malcolm X talked about the Nation's followers as "black people who are Muslims because [they] have accepted the religion of Islam,"[98] a statement that revised what he had said in the past and what Elijah Muhammad always claimed, that is, that the Nation of Islam was the only religion of black people. With these words, Malcolm X seemed to separate the racial identity of African Americans from their religious beliefs.

[96] Wallace D. Fard, the founder of the Nation of Islam, put forth a theology according to which the American black man was ethnically Asiatic: he claimed that the African American population descended from the "lost tribe of Shabazz," which had lived since the dawn of time in the Holy City of Mecca. The members of this ancient Muslim tribe were brought to America around four centuries ago, when slave traders kidnapped these "Black Asiatic," forcing them out of their mother land and condemning them to hundreds of years of suffering in the New World (Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 229; and Liz Mazucci, "Going Back to Our Own: Interpreting Malcolm X's Transition From 'Black Asiatic' to 'Afro-American,'" *Souls*, VII, 1 [2005], pp. 66-83, pp. 70-71).

[97] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 230.

[98] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 241.

In sum, 1964 was a watershed year in Malcolm X's life, but not just for the events and ideological evolution presented in this chapter: one month after founding the Muslim Mosque Inc., he left the United States to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, a trip that in addition to the Middle East brought him to Africa. The impact of these foreign realities was tremendous and therefore needs a thorough examination. For this reason, the next chapter covers Malcolm X's international experience of April and May 1964.

Chapter 2

OUTSIDE THE NATION OF ISLAM AND AMERICA: MALCOLM X IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT (APRIL–MAY 1964)

On March 8, 1964, after months of suspension and no prospect of reconciliation, Malcolm X's separation from the Nation of Islam became official. March also signed the beginning of his last year of life, as his assassination occurred in late February 1965. This chapter deals with the first part of this period, with particular attention to the five-week trip in the Middle East and Africa. In addition to the discussion of the international experience of April and May 1964, two more topics are presented in the following pages: an earlier travel that five years prior had brought Malcolm X overseas and three speeches pronounced in March 1964, which unveil his flourishing ideology after leaving the Nation.

First Trip Abroad (July 1959)

In July 1959, while still a minister of the Nation, Malcolm X travelled to the Middle East and Africa, leaving the United States for the first time. Most of the literary production tends to ignore this three-week trip, probably because little information about it is retrievable: Malcolm X himself barely mentioned this period in the *Autobiography*, where the entire experience is synthetized in just one paragraph (in comparison, the trip he took between April and May of 1964 occupies two chapters of the book).

What makes this first visit abroad particularly interesting and worth analyzing is that it brought Malcolm X to some of the same countries he visited in the last year of his life, but while his 1964 experience has generally been defined as life-changing and revolutionary, Malcolm X's international debut in 1959 has been overlooked by most of the scholars that studied the progressive development of his political, religious, and racial consciousness. It may be argued that in the late Fifties Malcolm X was not a prominent public figure yet, so his activity at that time used to generate less interest; alternatively, the fact that in 1959 he travelled as a

representative of the Elijah Muhammad may be considered why the potential for ideological growth resulting from this experience has been considered negligible by most scholars. Regardless of these speculations, the discussion of the trip in the summer of 1959 cannot be dismissed by simply minimizing its impact on Malcolm X's thought in comparison to the later experiences abroad: because this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive study of Malcolm X in the international context, the analysis of this period has not been avoided, even though it must be acknowledged that the limited sources available (both in quantity and in quality) make its examination quite challenging.

The travel that brought Malcolm X to the Middle East and Africa in July 1959 was organized with the primary purpose of establishing ties between the Nation of Islam and the international Muslim community. As the organization of Elijah Muhammad grew in popularity in the late Fifties and more people began to familiarize with its teachings, numerous denunciations of the unorthodox doctrines preached by the Black Muslims tended to overshadow the few praises coming from overseas.[99] This criticism threatened to delegitimize Elijah Muhammad and his organization in the eyes of the foreign Islamic community and, most importantly, it also created the risk of antagonizing the major Islamic states' leaders who followed their activities from abroad. The Nation valued the positive relations with the foreign communities and on a few occasions the interest was reciprocated, such as when the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser invited Elijah Muhammad to Egypt in 1959 under the title of official guest of state.[100] Unable to travel since the Department of State had withheld his passport, Elijah Muhammad sent Malcolm X to the Middle East as his emissary.[101] Eventually, Muhammad was able to make the trip in November 1959, just a few months after Malcolm X's return.

As mentioned before, detailed information about the experience is not easy to trace. One useful testimony was provided by a former member of the Harlem Mosque No. 7 and the Muslim Mosque Inc., Abdullah Abdur-Razzaq, who recounted that Malcolm X left the United States:

[99] According to Malcolm X, during this period the Muslim organization received several messages through which some unspecified "African and Asian personages" showed their appreciation to Elijah Muhammad and, more specifically, to "his efforts to awaken and lift up the American black people" (Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 238).

[100] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 165.

[101] Marika Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, Tsehai Publishers, Los Angeles 2011, p. 15.

> With the primary objective of preparing a way for Mr. Muhammad to make Hajj. Brother Malcolm X was welcomed to Egypt where he saw but did not meet Nasser. He told me he met the Vice President, Anwar Sadat… He did, however, after his passport was released, make umrah.[102] This leads one to believe that Malcolm X was successful in obtaining recognition… as an authentic Muslim. […] According to Malcolm X he did not reach Mecca. Reasons for not reaching Mecca are either sickness or reluctance to precede Mr. Muhammad.[103]

Multiple sources confirm this account: after arriving in Cairo in early July, Malcolm X encountered different political authorities and religious leaders, who welcomed him with open arms,[104] and was unable to visit Mecca because he had suffered from dysentery while in Egypt. The illness prevented him from following the itinerary he had planned before his departure, but in any case he would not have been able to make the Hajj since it had taken place in June.[105] Nonetheless, Malcolm X claimed in his 1964 travel journal that it was his choice not to go to Mecca because, as he wrote, "my respect and devotion to Honorable Elijah Muhammad made me not want to go there ahead of him."[106]

In comparison to this initial period abroad, the next steps of Malcolm X's trip (Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Nigeria, and Ghana)[107] have been documented even poorlier, which further

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[102] Hajj is Islam's fifth pillar and consist of a pilgrimage to Mecca during Dhu al Hijja (the last month of the Islamic calendar). Every Muslim is supposed to make it at least once in his lifetime, provided that he has the physical and financial ability of carrying it out. Umrah, on the other hand, is still a pilgrimage to Mecca, but it differs from Hajj as it is performed outside of Dhu al Hijja.

[103] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, pp. 15-16.

[104] Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1997, p. 191.

[105] An FBI file dated July 27, 1959, states Malcolm X's initial intentions as declared to the American Passport Office: he planned to depart from New York on June 5 to visit in two weeks United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Greece, United Arab Republic, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Lebanon, Turkey, and other countries "for the purpose of attending the annual sacred Moslem Pilgrimage Rites at the Holy City of Mecca" (Carson Clayborne, *Malcolm X: The FBI File*, Skyhorse Publishing, New York 2012, p. 147). It is not clear why the trip was postponed to July and why the itinerary was radically reformulated (maybe Malcolm X thought he was spied and therefore he tried to create a diversion?). In any case, the next month dysentery forced Malcolm X to remain in Egypt for eleven days, meaning that he was unable to travel for more than half of his three-week trip in the Middle East and Africa (Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 166).

[106] Boyd Herb and Al-Shabazz Ilyasah, eds., *The Diary of Malcolm X: El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz 1964*, Third World Press, Chicago 2013, location 303.

[107] In the *Autobiography*, Malcolm X listed only these four countries (plus Egypt) as part of his itinerary, but multiple sources added further stages to the journey, such as Israel and Syria (cited, among others, in Edward E. Curtis IV, "'My Heart Is in Cairo': Malcolm X, the Arab Cold War, and the Making of Islamic Liberation Ethics," *The Journal of American History*, CII, 3 [2015], pp. 775-798, p. 781), while other sources deny his visit to a few countries he indicated (for instance, in Claude Andrew Clegg III, *An Original Man: The Life and*

complicates the task of studying his encounters and the influence they had on him. Still, it is possible to evaluate the experience in its entirety, mostly through the correspondence Malcolm X had with American journalists and the comments he made at the Nation's meetings once he returned to the United States. According to FBI records, on July 26 Malcolm X stated that he was "well accepted" by the local Muslims who, he noticed, were "blacker than [him]," and reassured that "he was well entertained and squired around due to the fact that he was a Muslim."[108] Later, with regard to the Nation and the foreign perception of its activities, Malcolm X declared that "everywhere he visited Muhammad's program in North America is known."[109] One time he went as far as claiming that "Africans appear more concerned with the plight of their brothers in America than their conditions here in Africa."[110]

These are most likely exaggerated statements, which must be considered in relation to the context of the time: in fact, in the late Fifties Malcolm X was still in a phase of his life characterized by tireless work to expand the Nation's following, complete devotion to Elijah Muhammad and blind faith in the dogmas of the unorthodox Islam predicated by the Nation. These reasons explain why in the months that followed his return to the United States, Malcolm X continued to praise Elijah Muhammad and avoided presenting his honest and possibly troublesome considerations concerning what he had seen abroad: as the American biographer Peter Goldman pointed out, "Doubt was impermissible in the Nation [and] rebellion was unimaginable."[111] Furthermore, in addition to enhancing the connection with Arab Muslims, Malcolm X had a second goal for the trip: he hoped to use his experience as a positive testimony that would allow him to "excite, stimulate, and engender Afro-Asian and Muslim pride" among the black American population.[112] In light of this, it becomes clearer why the accounts of the travel were so enthusiastic, almost idyllic.

Times of Elijah Muhammad, St. Martins Griffin, New York 1998, p. 124, it is claimed that dysentery prevented Malcolm X from travelling to Ethiopia and Nigeria). It is difficult to assess with certainty the exact list of countries visited by Malcolm X in the summer of 1959, as there seems to be no consensus in the literature dealing with this period of his life. Overall, the fact that different sources questioned Malcolm X's personal account of his own travel is telling about the critical approach required in analyzing his declarations, especially those pronounced during the period at the service of the Nation of Islam.

[108] Clayborne, *Malcolm X: The FBI File*, p. 148.

[109] Clayborne, *Malcolm X: The FBI File*, p. 149.

[110] Malcolm X, "Africa Eyes Us," *Amsterdam News*, August 22, 1959, p. 10.

[111] Peter Louis Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, Harper & Row, New York 1973, p. 91.

[112] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 141.

Following this line of reasoning, some insightful elements emerge from what Malcolm X claimed to have witnessed abroad and from the comments he made concerning blackness in the international context. For instance, reflecting on the complexion of the Saudi population, Malcolm X affirmed:

> The people of Arabia are just like our people in America in facial appearance. They are of many differing shades, ranging from regal black to rich brown, but none are white. It is a safe postulation to say that 99 percent of them would be *jim-crowed* in the United States of America.[113]

Announcing that there were no white people in Saudi Arabia is a historically false claim, something that, moreover, Malcolm X himself contradicted years later when talking about all the different races he saw during his pilgrimage to Mecca. As a consequence, one may argue that Malcolm X consciously distorted what he saw in the region with the purpose of presenting a "non-jim-crowed" all-black society to the African American public, thus offering a reference for what they should have aimed to recreate domestically. Needless to say, the way to realize this was through something the Nation of Islam had been endorsing for decades: complete racial separation in the United States. Accordingly, the testimony of Malcolm X can be interpreted as propaganda for the Black Muslims' movement.

The deceptive idealization of foreign societies as a way to denounce the African Americans' condition at home can be found in other declarations made by Malcolm X, who also brought up religious elements associated with the subject of race. In this sense, it is particularly interesting the admission he made at his return, when he declared: "There is no color prejudice among Moslems, for Islam teaches that all mortals are equal and brothers. Whereas the white Christians in the Western world teach this same thing without practicing it."[114] Again, the claim is misleading in that it suggested that the countries he visited in the Middle East presented an unrealistic post-racial society; therefore, it is wiser to interpret it as a denounce of the domestic situation and Christianity rather than an actual description. What is most important, however, is Malcolm X's recognition that according to the traditional Islam (meaning Sunni Islam, the one he encountered overseas and the most practiced version

[113] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 141.
[114] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 141.

worldwide) preached something extremely different from what Elijah Muhammad had taught for years: indeed, Malcolm X witnessed the "trans-ethnic, non-racial character" of the Muslim religion, according to which, theoretically, "differences in native language, race, ethnicity, geography, and social class" are meaningless (provided that the believers follow devotedly the precepts of Islam).[115] In other words, the doctrine of the orthodox Islam was incompatible with that of the Nation, as the former ignored racial differences while the latter was founded on a paradigm that opposed the inherently evil white people to the oppressed black population.

This realization must have had a major impact on Malcolm X's race consciousness and his overall faith in the Nation's mission, but he did not discuss it publicly until his break with Elijah Muhammad: the freedom of expression he gained by leaving the organization would be exercised openly only in 1964, especially after his return from the international travels. It is for this reason that a detailed discussion of this subject is postponed to the next sections of this thesis, which deal with the last year of Malcolm X's life.

That being clarified, in closing the foreign experience of 1959 some considerations can be presented immediately: when he departed, Malcolm X was already familiar with some of the orthodox Islam's basic precepts,[116] and looked at the trip as "an opportunity to build both racial and religious solidarity."[117] Considering that it would have been uncharacteristic of him to show up completely ignorant of the Arab and African cultures and unprepared with regard to his own objectives, Malcolm X must have been conscious of the fact that the foreign approach to racial issues might have been divergent from that of the Nation. During the trip, Malcolm X found himself in need to justify the unorthodox, racially-charged stance of the Elijah Muhammad's organization, and he did so by emphasizing the cultural and historical differences that separated Western and Eastern Muslims.[118] According to DeCaro, his efforts to present himself "as a true Muslim with religious and cultural deficiencies" were successful,[119] but it might be argued that

[115] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 80.

[116] Malcolm X's first contacts with orthodox Muslims date back to his prison years; in this sense, they even preceded his conversion to the Nation of Islam (Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 328).

[117] Adil Ahmed, "Islam and Black America: The Religious Life of Malcolm X," *Journal of African American Studies*, XXIV, 3 (2020), pp. 456-481, p. 465.

[118] For instance, Malcolm X once justified his inability to speak Arabic (which prevented him from performing the orthodox prayer ritual) by explaining to his Arab hosts that he, as an African American man, "had been kidnapped for four hundred years, and was robbed of both his true language and religion" (DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 140).

[119] However, DeCaro also noticed that behind the acceptance of Malcolm X and the Nation there were political more than religious reasons: in the case of Egypt, President Nasser and his diplomats looked at the Black

the hardest challenge for Malcolm X (and Elijah Muhammad, once he completed his travel) was to convince himself rather than foreigners of the legitimacy of the Nation's racist dogmas in light of what he had witnessed abroad. The trip forced the two most powerful Black Muslims to have a moment of serious introspection: given that Elijah Muhammad's claim of being the "Messenger of Allah" was considered blasphemy in the Muslim world, would he renounce this status (along with the authority and wealth associated to it) to embrace orthodox Islam? If skin color did not matter to Muslims, how could the pursuit of racial separation in American society be legitimized? How could race define the evilness of the white man? Could the myth of Yacub still be adopted as a way to validate the Nation's theology?[120] These were the doubts that gradually led Malcolm X to question his racial stance. Still, the trip in 1959 signed the beginning of a process of reinvention and not a sudden ideological revolution. DeCaro synthetized very effectively the outcome of the international experience, explaining why Malcolm X did not fully embrace orthodox precepts of Sunni Islam concerning race and therefore he did not seek to import them in the United States:

> Standing in the Muslim world in 1959, Malcolm X was actually saying that race and color do not matter in Islam; he was asserting that humanity, and not the Nation's black-white dogma, was the basis of commonality in the religion of Allah. However, humanity, as Malcolm X viewed through the eyes of [the Nation], was dark, and only dark. Thus, when he spoke of humanity, equality, and brotherhood, Malcolm X's words always included the inevitable footnote that such truths could not be applicable, not even possible, in the white Christian world.[121]

Muslims with interest in light of their potential as a minority pressure group in the Western world and not as fellow Muslims to whom show sympathy (DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, pp. 139-140).

[120] As already briefly mentioned in the first chapter, Elijah Muhammad professed a theology according to which the original people were black, Muslim and lived in Mecca. Among them there was an evil scientist, Yacub, who "began the process of genetically engineering the white man, who was naturally brutish and rapacious." The Nation's preachers used this myth (or, from their point of view, historical evidence) to justify the claim that white people were devils by nature (Edward E. Curtis IV, "The Nation of Islam," in Muhammad Afzal Upal and Carole M. Cusack, eds., *Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements*, Brill, Leiden 2021, pp. 658-672, p. 663).

[121] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 142.

Malcolm X's loyalty to Elijah Muhammad and the ideology resisted for five more years; then, things changed as Malcolm X's distancing from the Nation and the following conversion to Sunni Islam forced him to review these conclusions.

Between the Split with the Nation and the Departure to the Middle East: Three Speeches (March−April 1964)

Before leaving the United States in April 1964, Malcolm X proved he had developed some new important ideological elements that deviated from what he had preached up until late 1963. These elements, which are essential to fully grasp his plan for the international adventure and the mindset with which he approached it, can be observed in three major speeches pronounced in the month that preceded his departure.

The first speech is dated March 12, 1964, on the occasion of the Muslim Mosque Inc.'s founding announcement and just four days after Malcolm X's official split with the Black Muslims, which makes the speech one of his first post-Nation public addresses and a meaningful display of his early ideas as a fully independent thinker. Titled "Declaration of Independence," the speech allowed Malcolm X to clarify his role in the African Americans' struggle for human rights: he started by addressing his departure from the Nation, stressing his untouched Muslim faith even outside of Elijah Muhammad's movement, and the belief that complete racial separation was still the goal to pursue; however, what changed compared to the past was Malcolm X's increased intellectual independency that allowed him "to use a more flexible approach toward working with others to get a solution to [the African Americans'] problem."[122] After this call for unity, Malcolm X announced the formation of the Muslim Mosque Inc. in New York, which would be open to "all Negros […] despite their religious or non-religious beliefs" and would be also receptive to white people's help, even though they were still not allowed to join the organization because Malcolm X was convinced that "there can be no black-white unity until there is first some black unity."[123]

Another important point introduced in the "Declaration of Independence" speech is the adoption of black nationalism as the group's political, economic, and social philosophy. This announcement requires special attention as Malcolm X's interpretation of black nationalism

[122] George Breitman, ed., *Malcolm X Speaks*, Grove Press, New York 1990, p. 20.
[123] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 21.

evolved as a consequence of his experience in Africa: at the moment of the speech in March 1964, he viewed this philosophy as "the idea that the black man should control the economy of his community, the politics of his community, and so forth."[124] More in detail, the American scholar Edward E. Curtis explained, "Malcolm X defined black nationalism as a comprehensive approach to social life that included economic self-determination, moral renewal, racial pride, and political involvement."[125]

There is a second element mentioned in the speech that, similarly to the concept of black nationalism, would be subject to a significant revision following Malcolm X's international travels: in aligning his separatist stance with that of Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X declared that the best solution for black Americans was to "go back home, to our own African homeland."[126] Despite the immediate admission that this goal was not feasible in the short- or even medium-term, it is worth mentioning that this was the last occasion in which Malcolm X talked of a diasporic movement as one of his objectives: inspired by the decolonization movements of the Sixties, Malcolm X returned home with the conviction that the black struggle must take the form of a revolution in the United States, where the African American population must "fight for what was rightfully theirs."[127]

Overall, what emerged from the speech of March 12 is a vision that, while probably cultivated for quite some time already under the Nation, was inevitably still immature at a distance of less than a week from the official break with the Black Muslims. The ideas expressed were in part imported from the Nation, but they also included new elements that could not possibly find space in the conservative, apolitical and religious organization of Elijah Muhammad. With the "Declaration of Independence," Malcolm X announced his openness to ideological change and to collaboration even with subjects that he had strongly criticized in the past: as he declared in an interview the following week, Malcolm X was ready to cooperate "with anybody who is sincerely interested in eliminating injustices that Negros suffer at the hands of Uncle Sam."[128]

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[124] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 212.

[125] Curtis, *Islam in Black America*, p. 91.

[126] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 20.

[127] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 19.

[128] George Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X: The Evolution of a Revolutionary*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1992, p. 29.

The second fundamental speech of the pre-travel period was part of a symposium centered on the subject "The Negro Revolt: What Comes Next?" that took place in Cleveland on April 3. The answer Malcolm X gave to the question became the title of his famous speech: "In my humble way of understanding it," he said, "it points toward either the ballot or the bullet."[129] This was a political and secular speech (that is, the contrary of the Nation's sphere of action) in which Malcolm X stressed the urgency of action "on all fronts by whatever means necessary"[130] and the need to form a united black front that, by putting aside its members' differences and acting as a voting bloc while the white American electorate was evenly split, could be decisive in tilting the balance toward the black community's preferred candidate at the upcoming elections. Indeed, Malcolm X explained in the *Autobiography* that "the polls are one place where every black man could fight the black man's cause with dignity, and with the power and the tools that the white man understands, and respects, and fears, and cooperates with."[131]

The encouragement to vote, however, was not sufficient to align Malcolm X's message with that of the other leaders of the Civil Rights Movement: after having criticized both the Democrats and the Republicans and having declared he did not consider himself American, Malcolm X warned that without swift recognition of black people's right to vote, "it is going to end up in a situation where we are going to have to cast a bullet."[132]

Most importantly for the analysis of Malcolm X in the international dimension, the speech introduced his intention to broaden the scope of the black struggle: he argued that a shift of focus from civil rights to human rights would allow the black American population to escape the unfair domestic jurisdiction while enabling "all of our African brothers and our Asian brothers and our Latin-American brothers [to] open their mouths and interfere in the domestic affairs of the United States."[133] By moving to the human rights' level, moreover, the black population could bring its case to the United Nations: here, the solidarity of the oppressed people of the Third World had the power to change the domestic status of the African American as a minority and to corroborate the accusation of Uncle Sam's oppressive conduct.[134]

[129] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 24.
[130] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 24.
[131] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 313.
[132] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 30.
[133] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 34.
[134] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, pp. 34-35.

Once again, the topics discussed in "The Ballot or the Bullet" were not innovative in absolute terms: references to Third Worldism, rebellion to colonial oppression and international solidarity between people of color, the attack to both Democratic and Republican parties, the call for unity with the civil rights leaders and the need to achieve proper freedom before demanding justice and equality are all messages that can be found also in Malcolm X's speeches from previous years.[135] The difference is that in the past the discussion of these elements and the related solutions were associated with religious themes and apocalyptic prophecies. A passage from Malcolm X's "Unity" speech of 1960 clearly illustrates this point:

> The Western World today faces a great catastrophe. It stands on the brink of disaster. Mr. Muhammad says the only way our people can avoid the fiery destruction that God Himself will soon unleash upon this wicked world is for our people to come together among themselves in unity and practice true brotherhood. Mr. Muhammad says God is with us to unite our people into one brotherhood, and to aid those that are oppressed, and to uplift those who are downtrodden.
>
> The Western World, filled with evil and wickedness, is groping and stumbling blindly through spiritual darkness toward its inevitable doom. Mr. Muhammad says we must qualify ourselves so that God's spiritual light will guide us past the pitfalls of destruction.[136]

In April 1964, Malcolm X was still a firm believer in Islam, but he was no longer a follower of Elijah Muhammad, so there was no need to praise him as a sacred figure with divine powers. In addition, Malcolm X's approach had become mostly secular and inclusive, as proven in the preface of "The Ballot or the Bullet," when he stated: "Although I am still a Muslim, I am not here tonight to discuss my religion. […] I am not here to argue or discuss anything that we differ about."[137]

The last speech discussed in this section is the one pronounced in New York on April 8, called "The Black Revolution," where Malcolm X presented a more in-depth vision of the black

[135] For instance, all these subjects can be found in the "Unity" speech, pronounced by Malcolm X in the spring of 1960. The transcript of the speech is reported in Lomax, *When the Word Is Given*, pp. 128-135.

[136] Lomax, *When the word Is Given*, p. 130.

[137] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 24.

struggle's internationalization. He talked of African Americans as a colonized population and denounced the American "divide-and-conquer" strategy employed for the purpose of deterring the creation of a united black front. These conditions, he concluded, are the same that "our brother and sisters" in Asia, Africa and Latin America suffered at the hands of the European colonial powers, who had deprived them of their human rights.

The speech followed the message of "The Ballot or the Bullet," meaning that by linking the American black struggle to the anti-colonial uprisings of the Third World, Malcolm X warned that the increased consciousness of the African American population would produce a revolution as intended in the colonized countries, that is, violent and aimed at overturning the system: "1964 will see the Negro revolt evolve and merge into the world-wide black revolution that has been taking place on this Earth since 1945. The so-called revolt will become a real black revolution. […] when I say black, I mean non-white—black, brown, red or yellow."[138] This international alliance would result in the outnumbering of the white community, which this time was not condemned in its entirety by Malcolm X: indeed, with a comment preluding to the change in racial ideology that became clearer only after his travel, he did not reject the concept of interracial solidarity:

> You have whites in the community who express sincerity when they say they want to help. Well, how can they help? How can a white person help the black man solve his problem? Number one, you cannot solve it for him. You can help him solve it, but you cannot solve it for him today. One of the best ways that you can help him solve it is to let the so-called Negro, who has been involved in the civil rights struggle, see that the civil rights struggle must be expanded beyond the level of civil rights to human rights. Once it is expanded beyond the level of civil rights to the level of human rights, it opens the door for all of our brothers and sisters in Africa and Asia, who have their independence, to come to our rescue.[139]

The message was not ground-breaking, in that Malcolm X still thought of black nationalism as his guiding philosophy. He also stayed true to his belief that the goal to achieve was black unity,

[138] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 50

[139] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 53.

and because this was the precondition for black-white unity, it would have been pointless to work on the latter in absence of the former. Still, it is interesting to notice how, in a speech where he denounced the "white man's court" as the institution that kept holding the American black population under a sort of colonial rule, Malcolm X began to acknowledge the existence of white people who sincerely opposed racism.[140]

In sum, the reading of previous three speeches from the transition period between the split with the Nation and the departure for foreign lands has revealed many significant elements. Among them there is the evidence that it was Malcolm X's new-found internationalism to urge him to travel, not the contrary: even though the trip to the Middle East and Africa was extremely impactful, it would be incorrect to consider it as the event that set in motion Malcolm X's ideological reinvention and the expansion of his project to an international scale. In other words, Malcolm X embarked on this trip because he was evolving, not to evolve.

Travel to the Middle East (April−May 1964)

Malcolm X left the United States on April 13 and travelled to Mecca through Frankfurt and Cairo. In addition to the urgency to flee the increasingly hostile attacks of the Nation's most militant representatives, who accused him of being a hypocrite and a traitor after he had abandoned the Black Muslims,[141] the trip had political and religious goals, as explained synthetically by Malcolm X in this statement from early 1965:

> I have travelled to the Middle East and Africa twice since leaving Elijah Muhammad in March of 1964, mainly to get a better understanding of Islam and the African countries, and in turn to give the Muslim World a better understanding of problems facing those of us here in America who are trying to become Muslims. Also, in Africa to give our people there a better understanding of the problems confronting Black Americans in our struggle for Human Rights.[142]

[140] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 50.

[141] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 305.

[142] L. Payne and T. Payne, *The Dead Are Arising*, pp. 532-533.

While the internationalization of the human rights struggle has already been introduced, it is important to present the religious component of the travel, which is essential in dealing with the evolution of Malcolm X's race consciousness. According to Goldman,

> His last years in the Nation had eroded his belief. […] He remained a religious man, a true believer cut loose from one system of faith and looking for another that would more nearly suit his experience of the world and would offer him religious legitimacy as well. He sought it in true Islam.[143]

Having missed his opportunity in 1959, Malcolm X decided this was the time to make the pilgrimage to the Holy City of Mecca. Before reaching Jeddah (the city in Saudi Arabia that represents the principal gateway to Mecca), Malcolm X had a layover in Frankfurt and spent two days in Cairo. His accounts here were enthusiastic: a short stay in Germany was enough for Malcolm X to notice that "Europeans act more human" and that "people seeing you as a Muslim saw you as a human being," something he had experienced in the United States only on the occasions in which he "was looked upon as a Muslim and not as a Negro."[144] Then Malcolm X spent two days in Cairo, where the Egyptians "accepted [him] like a brother."[145] His description of the flight to Jeddah is also characterized by a feeling of cultural shock: "Packed in the plane," Malcolm X remembered, "were white, black, brown, red, and yellow people, blue eyes and blond hair, and my kinky red hair, all together, brothers! All honoring the same God Allah, all in turn giving equal honor to each other."[146] Similarly, in Jeddah's airport, Malcolm X sensed that "love, humility, and true brotherhood was almost a physical feeling."[147]

These idyllic descriptions of racial harmony are a leitmotif in the chapter of the *Autobiography* dedicated to the Hajj. They also bring back the memory to the tone adopted in the accounts of the trip in 1959, where the idealization of the foreign experience appeared to have been used as propaganda for the Nation. In April 1964, however, Malcolm X could not have had the same intentions, because he embarked on the trip as an independent visitor and not as an emissary of Elijah Muhammad.

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[143] Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 163.
[144] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 321.
[145] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 321-322.
[146] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 323.
[147] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 325.

Does it follow that Malcolm X's words are indisputable and that the Middle East was indeed a post-racial society due to the Islamic faith of its inhabitants? Not necessarily: the descriptions might still be flawed. Contrary to the trip in 1959, Malcolm X talked at length of his experience in 1964 in a travel journal (which he hoped to publish in the form of a book),[148] in letters, in the correspondence with the American press and of course in the *Autobiography*, through which he intended to present his life as a story of self-improvement and redemption guided by Islam (initially the unorthodox version of the Nation and later Sunni Islam): to be effective, this project would require a climax in the narration, a watershed moment, which here is represented by the conversion to orthodox Islam, the only religion that Malcolm X believed to have the power to unite people of all colors under a common faith. Furthermore, reporting the presence of a genuinely supportive and racially egalitarian foreign society to the African American community could also help promote international solidarity, which was essential in connecting the different liberation struggles of colored people worldwide.

These considerations, however, are not to be interpreted as an accusation against Malcolm X of having created a false narrative in his writings and speeches: for a devout Muslim like him, the exciting prospect of stepping foot in the Holy Land and finally making the Hajj ("one of the most potent unifying factors in the world of Islam" according to DeCaro)[149] might understandably have hindered his objectivity in presenting race relations in the Arab world. Moreover, it must be considered that with the exception of his trip in 1959 (when, however, his complete loyalty to the Nation and its unorthodox doctrine had limited the open-mindedness with which he approached the experience), this was Malcolm X's first time out of the discriminatory American society, where as a black Muslim man he had always perceived himself as a minority both at the racial and at the religious level; on the contrary, outside the United States, Malcolm X found himself surrounded by people who shared his beliefs and who did not discriminate him just because of his dark complexion. This was undoubtedly a source of excitement, which partially justifies the biased representation of the events.

Moving back to the events in the Middle East, Malcolm X waited to appear in front of the Hajj Court (the tribunal responsible for attesting the pilgrims' Muslim credentials before allowing them to enter Mecca) in a dormitory in Jeddah for a few days after his arrival in Saudi Arabia. Describing in his diary the experience, Malcolm X wrote that the racial harmony and

[148] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 39.

[149] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 203.

the religious devotion of his fellow Muslims coming from all over the world made him "not conscious of color (race) around whites for the first time in [his] life. The whites do not seem white—Islam actually removed differences."[150] A similar testimony was offered in a letter from Jeddah dated April 20, shortly after the beginning of the pilgrimage:

> Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and the overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people *of all colors and races* […] 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*.
> […] There were tens of thousands of pilgrims from all over the world. They were *of all colors*, from blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans, but were all participating in the same ritual, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe could never exist *between the white and non-white*.[151]

This apparent re-evaluation of Malcolm X's racial thinking is even more evident in his considerations about Omar Azzam, the Arab man who picked him up from the dormitory and whose family (including the father, Abd al-Rahman Azzam, "one of the most powerful man in the Muslim world" according to Malcolm X)[152] offered him a suite at the Jeddah Palace Hotel and the services of a chauffeur, arranged his participation to the Hajj and even put him in touch with the Saudi Prince Al-Faisal (who honored Malcolm X with the status of state guest).[153] "In America," Malcolm X recounted, "[Omar Azzam] would have been called a white man, but—it struck me, hard and instantly—from the way he acted, I had no feeling of him being a white man."[154] It was difficult for Malcolm X to rationally reconcile his hosts' cordiality and generosity with his light complexion: "My instincts," he reflected, "automatically examined the reasons, the motives of anyone who did anything they did not have to do for me. Always in my life, if it was any white person, I could see a selfish move."[155] In this instance, a "physical

[150] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 233.
[151] Emphasis added to highlight the repetition of the racial motif (Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 59).
[152] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 251.
[153] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 18.
[154] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 331.
[155] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 333.

feeling of no difference between us as human beings" immediately pervaded Malcolm X and forced him to recognize the harmonizing power of Islam.[156] Shortly thereafter, he had a proper epiphany:

> That morning was when I first began to reappraise the "white man." It was when I first began to perceive that "white man," as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily; primarily it described attitudes and actions. In America, "white man" meant specific attitudes and actions toward the black man, and toward all other non-white men. But in the Muslim world, I had seen that men with white complexions were more genuinely brotherly than anyone else had ever been. That morning was the start of a radical alteration in my whole outlook about "white man."[157]

The reshaping of Malcolm X's race consciousness on the basis of his recent encounters might not have been as sudden as he described it, but there is little reason to question the truthfulness of his declaration. If anything, it might be argued that this epiphany in Mecca signed Malcolm X's definitive acceptance of a racial vision that had already been developing for quite some time: indeed, the shift of focus from color to behavior was something Malcolm X had already considered in the early Sixties, when he defended the Black Muslims' use of the expression "white devils" as follows:

> Unless we call one white man, by name, a "devil," we are not speaking of any *individual* white man. We are speaking of the *collective* white man's historical record. We are speaking of the collective white man's cruelties, and evils, and greeds, that have seen him *act* like a devil toward the non-white man.[158]

An even more substantial evidence can be found in a radio interview in May 1963, when Malcolm X affirmed: "When you are a Muslim, you do not look at the color of a man's skin […] When you are a Muslim, you look at the man and judge him according to his conscious

[156] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 331.
[157] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 333.
[158] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 266.

behaviour. […] We are against the white man because of what he has done to the black man."[159] Compared to the first statement, it can be noticed here the reference to Islam: it has been already demonstrated that Malcolm X's disillusionment with the Nation started before his official suspension in late 1963, but in this case it is difficult to affirm with certainty whether Malcolm X was using this message to distance himself from the organization's core principles: one may argue that he was trying to conform the Nation's racial doctrine to that of orthodox Islam, or maybe it was an attempt to attenuate the reputation of the Nation as an inherently and incorrigible racist organization so to appeal to a larger audience of potential followers. In any case, what the comment proves is that Malcolm X thought of racism in behavioral and not biological terms even before his international trips and the conversion to orthodox Islam.

There is another point concerning Malcolm X's perception of the events in Jeddah that needs to be contested: the way the Azzams' intentions were glorified in the *Autobiography*. Omar and Abd al-Rahman Azzam were put in contact with Malcolm X by a common acquaintance (Mahmoud Shawarbi, the director of the Islamic Foundation in New York) but they had never met prior to when Omar picked up Malcolm X from the dormitory in Jeddah. Malcolm X was basically a stranger to them and, given his notorious reputation in the United States as a demagogue preaching a racist version of Islam through messages of hate and violence, he thought that they had nothing to gain from welcoming him.[160] Nevertheless, he received a treatment that, in his words, "in America would be bestowed upon a King—not a Negro."[161] The conclusion Malcolm X reached, then, was that the warmth and generosity shown by this light-skinned Arab family could only be attributed to their Islamic faith, which removed racism from their minds and filled them with a color-blind compassion. This interpretation, in turn, supposedly led to Malcolm X's reconsideration of the white man as someone not biologically racist.

Even though the Azzams' altruism was unquestionable, their actions cannot be reduced to a totally disinterested display of religious solidarity: indeed, DeCaro explained that "Malcolm X's Muslim hosts have been properly tagged as leaders seeking religious opportunity, and possibly a foothold in the African American community."[162] Therefore, since they had been very impressed by the way Malcolm X spread the Islamic doctrine in the United States (even

[159] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 163.
[160] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 333.
[161] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 342.
[162] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 217.

though in the form of the heretical version taught by Elijah Muhammad) and by his charismatic leadership that made the black masses of urban America look up to him for guidance, the extremely generous hospitality and support they offered was "very likely a good measurement of the urgency with which they were seeking a viable African American exponent of Islam."[163]

After this examination of the change in Malcolm X's race consciousness, something can also be said about its consequences: as a pragmatic man no longer constrained by the Nation's conservatism, Malcolm X felt the need to announce his ideological evolution and the ways in which it would affect his strategies concerning the black struggle. Malcolm X communicated his radically altered views in a letter that, he acknowledged, would shock the American public that got to know him as a Black Muslim. Given the importance of its content, the central part of the letter deserves to be reported with little editing:

> America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases the race problem from its society. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with, people who would have been considered "white" in America—but the "white" attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen *sincere* and *true* brotherhood practitioner by all colors together, irrespective of their color.
>
> You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to *re-arrange* much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to *toss aside* some of my previous conclusions.
>
> […] in the *words* and in the *actions* and in the *deeds* of the "white" Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan, and Ghana.
>
> […] With racism plaguing America like an incurable cancer, the so-called "Christian" white American heart should be more receptive to a proven solution to such a destructive problem. Perhaps it could be in time to save America from imminent disaster—the same destruction brought upon Germany by racism that eventually destroyed the Germans themselves.

[163] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 217.

> Each hour here in the Holy Land enables me to have greater spiritual insights into what is happening in America between black and white. The American Negro never can be blamed for his racial animosities—he is only reacting to four hundred years of the conscious racism of the American whites. But as racism leads America up the suicide path, I do believe, from the experiences that I have had with them, that the whites of the younger generation, in the colleges and universities, will see the handwriting on the wall and many of them will turn to the *spiritual* path of *truth*—the *only* way left to America to ward off the disaster that racism inevitably must lead to.
>
> […]
>
> Sincerely,
>
> El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (Malcolm X)[164]

These passages from the letter include many significant points: firstly, while in the past Malcolm X had stressed the need to bring to the African Americans' attention the Nation of Islam (which he considered the true religion of black people), now he held that the entire country, not just one of its communities, must understand Islam to tackle the race problem. Secondly, Malcolm X used "the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan, and Ghana" as the standard for judging the sincere color-blindness of the white Arab Muslims, but since the letter was written before he left for Africa, he must have been referencing his experience of July 1959: this confirms that Malcolm X remembered witnessing the practice of the orthodox Islam's anti-racist doctrine already at that time, but his race-biased worldview prevented him from considering Islam as the solution for racism in America (or, in alternative, he might have consciously chosen to continue predicating Elijah Muhammad's message while waiting for a proof that Sunni Islam could be adopted sincerely by white people too, for which he had to wait five years). Thirdly, he mentioned specifically "the so-called 'Christian' white American" as a category that needed to review their belief system since the adoption of Islam to counter the cancer of racism was "a proven solution." Fourthly, Malcolm X proved once again to have moved past Elijah Muhammad's teachings when, after warning of a concrete risk of imminent disaster for America (a style typical of the apocalyptic Nation's theology), he cited the historically-based and secular case of Germany instead of relying on the threat of an unspecified

[164] Emphasis reported as in the original text (Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 340-342).

divine punishment. Lastly, Malcolm X said he had faith in the new generations of educated white Americans, whom he considered "more incensed over [racism]" and "more filled with an urge to eliminate it";[165] furthermore, he valued the fact that their "young, less-hampered intellect" made them particularly susceptible the Muslim doctrine.[166]

The letter also includes a curious element that deserves attention: Malcolm X's use of the name "El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz" as his signature. A part of the scholarly literature presented this change as Malcolm X's decision to leave behind the name (and the identity associated to it) he adopted under the Nation after having completed the pilgrimage to Mecca, but this theory is incorrect: already in the late Fifties, Elijah Muhammad allowed his ministers to use the surname Shabazz instead of X in honor of the Shabazz tribe, the Afro-Asiatic people that the Nation's theology presented as the first black people enslaved and brought to America,[167] while "El-" is simply the article "the" in Arab. Regarding Malik, in an interview in May 1963 Malcolm X declared that he considered it to be his real Muslim name;[168] consequently, according to Marable, in combining Malik with the surname Shabazz, Malcolm X created "an identity that rooted him to the Nation's imaginary history while at the same time granting him the freedom to operate as an individual in the secular world of politics."[169] El Hajj is the only part of the name Malcolm X adopted in 1964, since it is a title reserved for Muslims who perform the Hajj.

In light of this examination, the theory according to which the old Malcolm X "died" in the Middle East and was replaced by a new man by the name of El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz is wrong to the extent that it claims to present the new name as something Malcolm X conceived while abroad to disassociate himself from Elijah Muhammad, for the simple reason that part of it references elements linked to the Nation. Having said that, the change should not be judged insignificant, since the new title "El Hajj" signaled Malcolm X's adoption of Sunni Islam as a central component of his identity.

The Hajj ended on April 24, but Malcolm X did not leave Saudi Arabia right away. During the last week of April, he had busy days and notable encounters (among which stands out the

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[165] Steve Clark, ed., *Malcolm X Talks to Young People: Speeches in the United States, Britain, and Africa*, Pathfinder Press, New York 2002, p. 7.

[166] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 209.

[167] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 135.

[168] David Gallen, *Malcolm X: As They Knew Him*, Carroll & Graf Publishers, New York 1992, p. 125.

[169] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 193.

visit to the Saudi Prince Faisal), but also the time to reflect and write down his thoughts about the experience and how they could be functional to his international agenda. On April 24, he noted in his diary:

> The Hajj is Islam's best advertisement (selling point). If the Hajj alone were properly pictured to the outside world (taking first into account the psychology of the outside world) millions of converts would be added yearly to the ranks of the Muslims. […] I pray [the Muslims] will also see the necessity of modernizing the methods to propagate Islam, and project an image that the mind of the modern world can understand.[170]

The reading of this passage highlights the sharp contrast between the sensitivity Malcolm X displayed when describing the racially egalitarian atmosphere in Mecca and the pragmatism that characterizes the definition of his projects' next steps. With regard to the latter, the note shows how the overwhelming emotions he felt while in Mecca did not prevent him from analyzing rationally the challenges of spreading Islam worldwide: in his writings, Malcolm X did not ignore the possible resistance stemming from the "psychology of the outside world" nor the cultural differences between the East and the West that made the traditional "methods to propagate Islam."[171] Another factor that Malcolm X did not treat emotionally was the double dimension of his foreign trip, as the day before (April 23) he had remarked:

> Our success in America will involve two circles: Black Nationalism and Islam—it will take Black Nationalism to make our people conscious of doing for self and then Islam will provide the spiritual guidance. Black Nationalism will link us to Africa and Islam will link up spiritually to Africa, Arabia and Asia.[172]

The clarity of this declaration is significant not only in the measure that it shows Malcolm X's drive to execute his project of black liberation, but also because it substantiates the claim that the naiveté of his accounts of the Middle Eastern race relations was the result of a deliberate

[170] The annotations in parenthesis and the underlining are reported as in Malcolm X's writings (Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, locations 403-421).

[171] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 421.

[172] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 403.

choice more than a pervasive feeling of color-blind brotherhood overwhelming him. The motivation behind it, then, might have been Malcolm X's determination, as reported at the end of the second-to-last quotation, to "project an image [of Islam] that the mind of the modern world can understand."[173]

Continuing with the theme of Malcolm X's objectives, the scholars Ruby and E. U. Essien-Udom claimed that, in addition to getting a better understanding of the real Islam, Malcolm X saw in the Hajj an opportunity to fulfil two other goals: building ties between the new-born Muslim Mosque Inc. and the Middle Eastern Muslim community and win new allies willing to side with the African American population in bringing the United States' case of human rights violations to the United Nations.[174] With regard to the second, Malcolm X wrote in his diary on April 26:

> I have not bitten my tongue twice, nor passed a single opportunity in my travels to tell the truth about the real plight of our people in America. It shocks these people. They knew it was "bad" but never dreamt it was as inhuman (psychologically castrating) as my uncompromising projection of it pictures it to them. […] [Islam] gives the believer genuine voluntary obligations toward his fellow men […] and because the True Believer recognizes the Oneness of all humanity the suffering of others is as if he himself were suffering, and deprivation of the human rights of others as if his own human rights […] were being deprived.[175]

Therefore, in spite of having trouble communicating since he only spoke English in an Arab country, every time Malcolm X had a chance to preach "a quick little sermon on America's racism and its evils,"[176] he did not shy away from what he considered being his responsibility as a proponent of the black struggle: facilitating international solidarity so as to substantiate the black Americans' cause. This needs to be stressed since the literature dealing with Malcolm X sometimes tends to categorize his 1964 foreign experience as spiritual in the Middle East and

[173] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, locations 403-421.

[174] Ruby M. Essien-Udom and E. U. Essien-Udom, "Malcolm X: An International Man," in John Henrik Clarke, ed., *Malcolm X: The Man and His Times*, Africa World Press, Trenton 1990, pp. 235-267, p. 245.

[175] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 492.

[176] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 338.

political in Africa, which is not incorrect in absolute terms, but represents undoubtedly an oversimplification.

In conclusion of the analysis of Malcolm X's time in the Muslim world, there is a passage of the *Autobiography* that underlines how, despite his recent infatuation with the racially egalitarian Muslim principles, Malcolm X could not ignore, as Edward E. Curtis phrased it, "the power of race as a sociological reality."[177] In Mecca, Malcolm X could not help but notice the presence of "a color pattern in the huge crowds" of pilgrims, which led him to conclude that even in the Holy Land, where he thought there was no segregation nor inferiority complexes on the basis of race, people tended to voluntarily gather with their similar.[178] Malcolm X justified his instinct to detect such pattern by claiming that Americans were naturally "sensitive to matters of color."[179] Yet, the previous observation raises some questions: did Malcolm X contradict his depiction of the Islamic world as a post-racial paradise by identifying huge crowds of color-conscious Muslim? By saying that "Africans were with Africans, Pakistanis were with Pakistanis, and so on,"[180] did he affirm that the power of Islam as a belief system capable of eliminating the race problem from the society is limited by natural tendencies of racial separatism?

In reality, the fact that people of the same kind were drawn to each other did not represent a contradiction in Malcolm X's mind: for one, in narrating this observation inside the *Autobiography*, he said he could not wait to present it to the American public, so it is difficult to believe that he had not noticed the flaw of his interpretation, which could have easily appeared at odds with his previous accounts. Then, the fact that at the Hajj there were distinct groups of homogeneous people was not necessarily an indicator of racism, but rather it reinforced the validity of Malcolm X's pre-trip convictions: the black struggle required first and foremost unity within the single communities and, secondly, integration was not an indispensable precondition to the eradication of racism from the American society.

[177] Curtis, *Islam in Black America*, p. 96.
[178] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 344.
[179] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 344.
[180] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 344.

Travel to Africa (May 1964)

Malcolm X left the Middle East on May 6, when he departed from the airport of Cairo to reach Lagos, Nigeria. His African sojourn was shorter than the one in the Muslim world and its report in the *Autobiography* is equally briefer, but this is not to say that the information available about the second phase of his trip is limited: in fact, Malcolm X's great popularity in Africa made it so that locals (especially the community of American expatriates in Ghana) documented extensively his stay in the continent. During the two weeks in Africa, Malcolm X spent most of the time in Nigeria and Ghana, but he also visited four other Western and Northern African countries (Liberia, Senegal, Morocco, and Algeria) before returning to New York on May 21. Overall, following a busy itinerary that brought him to six countries in fifteen days did not prevent Malcolm X from fully appreciating Africa, as proved by the constantly positive accounts of the reception he received, his interactions and the enthusiastic response to his lectures and meetings.

Before proceeding with an overview of the events, it is useful to recall Malcolm X's two main missions for the second part of the trip: creating diplomatic ties between the African nations and the American black community and mobilizing new allies "to take the case of the American Negro before the United Nation."[181] After an experience in the Middle East that was meaningful mostly for spiritual reasons, Malcolm X was now determined to pursue a more practical and political agenda in Africa, an approach that favored the setting of the Pan-Africanist ideology as his model of reference for the black struggle back home.[182] Despite the primarily political dimension of the African mission, this two week experience presents also some interesting insights concerning Malcolm X's ideas about race.

Malcolm X stayed in Nigeria for only five days, from May 6 to 10, during which one moment in particular deserves to be analyzed: the public lecture at the University of Ibadan on May 8. The subject of his address was "Our Struggle in the Context of African Liberation Movement" and no recording or transcript of the lecture is available, so its analysis has to rely on the accounts of people who attended the event. At the time, E. U. Essien-Udom, an

[181] Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 172

[182] Pan-Africanism can be defined as "a movement toward economic cooperation, cultural awareness, and international political solidarity among people of African descent" (Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims*, p. 17).

acquaintance of Malcolm X who had welcomed him at his arrival in Lagos,[183] was a professor at Ibadan University and recalled the subjects touched during the speech:

> Malcolm X stressed the necessity for the African nations to lend their help in bringing the Afro-American's case before the United Nations. He argued that the Afro-American community should cooperate with the world's Pan-Africanists; and that even if they remained in America physically, they should return to Africa philosophically and culturally and develop a working unity within the framework of Pan-Africanism.[184]

The message was clear and coherent with what Malcolm X had been declaring for a while, but the response of the African students was like nothing he had ever experienced: in addition to recalling their "almost fanatic interest and sympathy,"[185] Malcolm X was made a honorary member of the Nigerian Muslim Students' Society and was assigned the name "Omowale," which means "the son who has come home" in the Yoruba language.[186] He was deeply touched by this gesture, to the point of confessing in the *Autobiography* that he "had never received a more treasured honor."[187]

With regard to the content of the passage quoted above, it is relevant to notice the concept of philosophical and cultural return of the African Americans to their motherland. On March 8, in the speech "A Declaration of Independence" (discussed earlier in this chapter), Malcolm X had claimed to agree with Elijah Muhammad's belief that the ideal solution for the black struggle in America was to achieve complete separation by returning to Africa, even though it was "a long-range program."[188] Now, Malcolm X talked of "cooperation with the world's Pan-Africanists" and presented the new mindset needed for black Americans to fight for their human rights instead of suggesting that, eventually, they would have to flee the United States to obtain such rights.

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[183] Malcolm X and E. U. Essien-Udom had met in the United States in the early Sixties, when Essien-Udom was conducting a study on the Nation, which he published in the form of a book titled *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* (Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 350).

[184] R. Essien-Udom and E. U. Essien-Udom, "Malcolm X: An International Man," p. 247.

[185] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 694.

[186] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 351.

[187] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 351.

[188] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 20.

Another interesting excerpt from the speech at Ibadan University is found in an FBI report retrieved by the historian Marika Sherwood:

> The American propagandists have tried to tell you that American Negros are not interested in Africa and Africans are not interested in American Negros…The black man has been so victimised in America that we do not even like each other. We have lost our self-respect… They have killed us morally. […] Three people are responsible for the Negro loss of identity: the slave trader, the slave master and the slave maker. The government of the United States is a government of white people by white people and for the benefit of white people… Remember, the white man is the greatest hate teacher who ever walked the face of the earth.[189]

It is possible to see in these lines (and, in general, in most of his African speeches) how Malcolm X presented the denunciation of the racist American government and the attempts of the "American propagandists" to prevent the international linkage of black struggles through a work of "psychological castration," as he had defined it in his travel journal a few days earlier:[190] loss of self-respect, morality and identity are for Malcolm X all consequences of the centuries-long plight of the African American population. Consciousness, therefore, was a key element of Malcolm X's message, as he further proved in an interview with the *Daily Express* published on May 11, 1964, where he declared that his movement's goal was "to change the image of Negros in the US to a positive one with a view to restoring our cultural identity and build up communications and understanding between black Muslims in the US and African countries."[191]

After the public lecture at Ibadan University, Malcolm X had the chance to meet numerous high-level Nigerian personalities: he recalled having been in "private discussions with many government and religious leaders and other persons of prominence in Nigeria" and he also specified that they "showed genuine concern for our problems and expressed a sincere desire

[189] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 28.
[190] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 492.
[191] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, pp. 31-32.

to help."[192] Malcolm X left Nigeria on May 10 with the conviction that "it [was] time for all African-Americans to become an integral part of the world's Pan Africanists."[193]

In light of this last consideration, the next step of Malcolm X's trip could not be but Ghana, the "political Mecca of the Pan-Africanist movement"[194] and the first major state in Western Africa to achieve independence in 1957 under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, a strong supporter of Pan-Africanism who studied in the United States and Britain before returning in his homeland and founding the Convention People's Party in 1949, which two years later won the first parliamentary elections when Ghana was still under British control.[195] The country's recent decolonization, the sympathetic philosophy professed by Nkrumah and the example set by prominent intellectuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois (who died in Accra less than a year before Malcolm X's arrival) created the ideal condition for a community of about two hundred African American expatriates to settle in Ghana in the late Fifties and early Sixties.[196] According to the Black nationalist Leslie Lacy, "Malcolm X was their real political leader and they had come to Ghana not because they loved Mother Africa, but rather, because they hated Father America";[197] therefore it is not surprising to report their warm reception at Malcolm X's arrival in Accra and their great contribution in making his trip to Ghana the best documented among his international experiences of 1964. They even formed a group, the Malcolm X Committee, to help him arrange his public appearances.[198]

Malcolm X established immediately the reason for his presence in Ghana during a press conference on May 11: "The essence of this trip to Africa," he said, "is to establish good relations and communication between the Africans at home and the Africans in America."[199] He also described his hope for Pan-Africanism in a letter to the *New York Amsterdam News*' journalist Jimmy Booker, drawing an interesting comparison with Zionism:

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[192] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 30.

[193] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 63.

[194] R. Essien-Udom and E. U. Essien-Udom, "Malcolm X: An International Man," p. 247.

[195] Anthony Best et al., *International History of the Twentieth Century and Beyond*, Routledge, London 2014, pp. 441-443.

[196] Among them, Marable cites Julian Mayfield, Ana Livia Cordero, Maya Angelou, Alice Windom, Preston King and W.E.B. Du Bois' wife Shirley (Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 314; and Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 37).

[197] Leslie Lacy, "African Responses to Malcolm X," in Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, eds., *Black Fire: An Anthology of African-Americans Writing*, William Morrow and Company, New York 1968, pp. 19-38, p. 25.

[198] R. Essien-Udom and E. U. Essien-Udom, "Malcolm X: An International Man," p. 247.

[199] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 37.

> We can learn much from the strategy used by the American Jews. They have never migrated physically to Israel, yet their cultural, philosophical and psychological ties to Israel have enhanced their political and economic and social position right here in America. Pan-Africanism will do for people of African descent all over the world the same that Zionism has done for all Jews all over the world. […] people of African descent all over this earth must help Africa to become free and strong, and America in turn must obligate itself to help people of African descent all over this earth.[200]

Malcolm X used this parallel to reiterate the message of mental instead of physical separatism, but what surprises is the suggestion to take the American Jews as a point of reference, given that in an interview with Alex Haley of just one year earlier he accused them of taking advantage of the black communities and contributing to keep them segregated in the ghettos.[201] Even though what was contained in the letter to Jimmy Booker was not necessarily a praise to the American Jews, the message is indicative of Malcolm X evolution and overall willingness to reassess his own opinions.

The most significant testimonies in Malcolm X's early days in Ghana, however, are those that present some insights on his post-Mecca ideas about race relations: on May 11, Malcolm X noted in his diary that his hotel's dining room hosted "business tycoons (international) having breakfast, discussing the untapped wealth of Africa."[202] In a letter from the same day, he went beyond just reporting their presence:

> It is full of Americans and other whites who are well aware of its untapped natural resources. The same whites, who spit in the faces of blacks in America and sic their police dogs upon us to keep us from "integrating" with them, are

[200] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, pp. 37-38.

[201] In this interview from May 1963 for *Playboy* magazine, Malcolm X said: "The Jew is always anxious to advise the black man. But they never advise him how to solve his problem the way the Jews solved their problem," that is, by using "their ultimate power, the economic weapon." With it, "the Jews pooled [the black men] money and bought the hotels that barred them" and sent them "doing all this wading-in, boring-in, even burying-in—everything but buying-it" (Murray Fisher, ed., *Alex Haley: The Playboy Interviews*, Ballantine Books, New York 1993, p. 30).

[202] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 715.

> seen throughout Africa, bowing, grinning and smiling in an effort to "integrate" with the Africans—they want to "integrate" into Africa's wealth and beauty. This is ironical.[203]

This articulation of thoughts is extremely important because it led Malcolm X to adopt a particularly confrontational stance toward those people throughout the rest of his tour: as he recalled in the *Autobiography*, "Right there […] was where I made up my mind that as long as I was in Africa, every time I opened my mouth, I was going to make things hot for that white man."[204] The critical point concerning race relations here is the apparent contradiction with the ideals of racial brotherhood he had embraced a few days before in Mecca, but Malcolm X recognized and immediately addressed the ambiguity of his reaction by arguing:

> The Muslims of "white" complexion who had changed my opinions were men who had showed me that they practiced genuine brotherhood. And I know that any American white man with a genuine brotherhood for a black man was hard to find, no matter how much he grinned.[205]

This is a comment coherent with his new conviction inspired by Islam that people should be judged on the basis of their intentions: in this case, what he saw were white men who in America "sicked police dogs on black people and threw bombs in black churches"; so now, "once again in the land where their forefathers had stolen blacks and thrown them into slavery," Malcolm X could only feel suspicious in overhearing their interest in the natural resources of his African brothers.[206]

In the following days, Malcolm X discussed the African Americans' plight with more than twelve ambassadors of Third World countries in service in Ghana,[207] among which one interaction stands out for the impact it had on his race consciousness and the formulation of his political project: the meeting with the Algerian ambassador Taher Kaid. In what he defined in his diary to be "a wonderful talk" with a man who he regarded as "very perceptive, militant,

[203] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 62.
[204] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 352.
[205] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 352.
[206] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 352.
[207] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 889.

aware of the effort to divide blacks,"[208] Malcolm X was encouraged to re-evaluate his understanding of black nationalism as the guiding philosophy of the black struggle. Curiously, he did not report this interaction in his travel journal and in the *Autobiography*, but its content can be found in an interview to the *Young Socialist* on January 18, 1965:

> YOUNG SOCIALIST: How do you define Black nationalism, with which you have been identified?
> MALCOLM X: I used to define Black nationalism as the idea that the Black man should control the economy of his community, the politics of his community, and so forth.
> But when I was in Africa in May, in Ghana, I was speaking with the Algerian ambassador who is extremely militant and is a revolutionary in the true sense of the word (and has his credentials as such for having carried on a successful revolution against oppression in his country). When I told him that my political, social, and economic philosophy was Black nationalism, he asked me very frankly: well, where did that leave him? Because he was white. He was an African, but he was an Algerian, and to all appearances, he was a white man. And he said if I define my objective as the victory of Black nationalism, where does that leave him? Where does that leave revolutionaries in Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania? So he showed me where I was alienating people who were true revolutionaries dedicated to overturning the system of exploitation that exists on this earth by any means necessary.
> So I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of Black nationalism. Can we sum up the solution to the problems confronting our people as Black nationalism? And if you notice, I have not been using the expression for several months.[209]

In recognizing the flaws of his thinking-pattern, Malcolm X revised one of the cornerstones of his post-Nation ideology by embracing a Pan-Africanist approach and by thinking in actual international terms instead of still relying on a color-biased paradigm: the conversation with the

[208] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 753.
[209] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, pp. 119-120.

Algerian ambassador convinced Malcolm X that linking the struggles of African Americans and Africans around a purely racial element would undermine the inclusivity of his project. As Goldman observed, "The Hajj had made it possible for him to forget Kaid's color but not his own. He began to wonder after that whether the politics of blackness might be cutting him off from important sources of support, […] his talk with Kaid lent new shadings to his consciousness."[210]

The same day he talked of black nationalism with the Algerian ambassador, Malcolm X gave a speech at the University of Ghana in Legon, where he discussed various subjects that he had presented quite regularly throughout his tour abroad: the hypocrisy in the United States' claim to be a democracy and the leader of the Free World at the same time that the black American population "still [had] to beg and crawl just to get a chance to drink a cup of coffee";[211] the fact that he did not consider himself an American, but rather a victim of America, because being black in the United States meant living the American nightmare instead of the American dream; the irony of seeing white Americans supporting integration when they were in Ghana, even though what they meant was integration with the natural wealth of the continent and not the African people; and the colonial-style oppression of twenty-two million African Americans practiced by the United States, which therefore must be considered a proper colonial power.

In focusing on race consciousness, however, the point of the speech that deserves more attention concerns the black man's self-perception. Starting with a praise to the Ghanaian president's progressiveness, Malcolm X declared:

> President Nkrumah is doing something there that the government in America does not like to see done, and that is he is restoring the African image. He is making the African proud of the African image; and whenever the African becomes proud of the African image and this positive image is projected abroad, then the Black man in America, who up to now has had nothing but a negative image of Africa—automatically the image that the Black man in America has of his African brothers changes from negative to positive, and the image that the

[210] Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 180.
[211] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 22.

> Black man in America has of himself will also change from negative to positive.[212]

This interrelated re-evaluation of self, in Malcolm X analysis, would be at the expenses of the American racists, who tried to preserve the negative image of Africa in the rest of the Americans' eyes because to them the black people's negative self-perception was a precondition for subordination: "The day that the image of Africa is changed from negative to positive," Malcolm X concluded, "automatically the attitude of twenty-two million Africans in America will also change from negative to positive."[213]

During his speech at the University of Ghana, Malcolm X discussed the subject of identity also by presenting the methods adopted in America to establish second-class citizenship through the naming of minorities:

> The "American Negro" is the only American who brings America first when he wants to denominate or name itself. We have Polish Americans, Italian Americans, Irish Americans. They all put their ancestry before America. Only the "American Negro" mentions America first. That shows you that he has no sense of identity. And you in Africa have to understand that and help him get his identity back.[214]

Malcolm X paid great attention to the issue of naming and the use of racial terms: in a previous press conference, he was advised not to use the term "Negro" and to prefer "African American" since, according to his African audience, it had "greater meaning and dignity."[215] In the following months, then, Malcolm X developed his own critique of the term: "One of the main reasons we are called Negro," he declared on January 24, 1965, during a speech at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem, "is so we will not know who we really are. […] You cannot claim to any language, […] to any name, […] to any culture as long as you use the word Negro to identify yourself. It attaches you to nothing it does not even identify your color."[216] By accepting the

[212] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 25.
[213] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 26.
[214] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 44.
[215] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 354.
[216] Steve Clark, *Malcolm X on Afro-American History*, Pathfinder, New York 1990, p. 24.

name, then, a black person negates his own existence and also his history: Malcolm X argued that black history was glorious and dated back millennia, while the "Negro" history was only the recent one, marked by slavery and segregation in America; so, since Malcolm X believed that someone who is deprived of his history or culture was nothing more than a dead person, there could be no pride in being a "Negro" and no ambition to identify with the African population.[217] More about the implications of the term will be discussed in the next chapter.

In sum, the week spent in Ghana appears to have been fruitful. Malcolm X established ties with numerous important figures: he had a meeting with President Nkrumah, spoke in front of the Ghanian Parliament and discussed the plight of the African American population with many diplomats from African, Arab, Asian and Latin American countries.[218] Furthermore, while in Ghana Malcolm X began to define his plan for a new organization inspired (both in the name and in the objectives) by the Organization of African Unity:[219] the Organization of Afro-African Unity. Before returning to the United States and founding it, however, Malcolm X spent four more days in Africa, visiting Liberia, Senegal, Morocco, and Algeria between May 17 and 21. There is little or no information about this last part of the tour, to the point that, as Sherwood argued, it can be presumed that "all Malcolm X did was change planes."[220] He landed in New York on May 21.

[217] Tyner, *The Geography of Malcolm X*, pp. 56-57.

[218] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 21.

[219] The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was founded in 1963 by thirty-one African countries and had as its principal aims "the liberation of the remaining colonies and the liquidation of all forms of oppression" (Zdenek Červenka, "The Organization of African Unity in the Seventies," *Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, V, 1 [1972], pp. 29-39, p. 29).

[220] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 62. In a summary of his trip, he wrote once back in the United States, Malcolm X claimed he had planned to visit Sudan, Kenya, Zanzibar, Tanganyika (modern day Tanzania) and Uganda too, but because he prolonged his stay in Saudi Arabia he was not able to tour Eastern Africa. Might this have also been the reason why he spent so little time in Liberia, Senegal, Morocco, and Algeria? (Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 873).

Chapter 3

THE SECOND, LONGER INTERNATIONAL TOUR (MAY−NOVEMBER 1964)

Between May and November 1964, Malcolm X spent only fifty days in the United States. Similarly to the period of transition occurred after the split with the Nation and before the departure to the Middle East in April, this time separating the first and second international trips was extremely meaningful: Malcolm X gave several public speeches and interviews in which he detailed his recent experience overseas, explaining its impact on his thinking and how it would influence his projects on the way forward. In light of its significance, the current chapter opens with a discussion of this second transition period, which is then followed by a detailed analysis of the long trip that kept Malcolm X away from the United States until late 1964.

Transition Period in the United States (May−July 1964)

Among the many important topics concerning the period between late May and early July 1964, three in particular deserve a closer look: Malcolm X's exposition of the insight gained from the recent tour in the Middle East and Africa, the foundation of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, and the escalation of tensions with the Nation.

With regard to the first one, the American press had been publicizing Malcolm X's foreign reflections about race when he was still abroad: some passages of his letters, such as the one reporting his experience in Mecca and the influence it had on his racial and religious beliefs, were instrumental in creating excitement for his return, as proven by the commotion at his arrival in New York, where at the airport he was greeted by a group of around fifty journalists firing "subjective, scapegoat-seeking questions" at him.[221]

[221] In the *Autobiography*, Malcolm X brought examples of the provocative questions he was asked: "Mr. Malcolm X, what about those 'Blood Brothers,' reportedly affiliated with your organization, reportedly trained for violence, who have killed innocent white people?" And: "[W]hat about your comment that Negroes should form rifle clubs?" (Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 360-361).

Upon his return to the United States, Malcolm X's schedule remained as busy as that of the recent trip. Wasting no time, he held a press conference on May 21, the day of his arrival: asked about the brotherhood he witnessed in Mecca and the resulting effect on his projects, Malcolm X clarified that he was still uninterested in integration in the American society because it had never proven useful in eliminating racism. At the same time, recalling how the white Muslims in Mecca (or at least what in the United States would have been classified as white given the light complexion) treated everyone as human beings regardless of skin color, Malcolm X said he wished white Americans would study Islam: as he declared in a later speech, this "religious philosophy […] is the only thing that can remove the white from the mind of the white man and the Negro from the mind of the Negro."[222]

Then, asked whether he had lost his animosity toward all white people in light of the positive treatment received overseas, he answered: "No matter how much respect, no matter how much a recognition whites showed toward me, as far as I am concerned, as long as that same respect and recognition is not shown to every one of our people in this country, it does not exist for me."[223] A similar firmness was displayed when talking about the possibility of bringing the American racist practices before international tribunals: "I would not be a man if I was in a position to bring it in front of the United Nations and did not do so," declared Malcolm X before reaffirming his willingness to collaborate with anyone eager to solve the race problem in the United States, since he was finally free from the hands-off approach of the Black Muslims.[224] Malcolm X concluded the press conference by addressing his new unshaven beard (which he said had no religious significance; rather, the fact that he was not adopting a "cleaner style" symbolized a conscious rejection of cultural norms imposed on black people, which in turn represented the first step toward liberation from cultural and eventually mental colonialism) and name (confirming the previous use of Malik El Shabazz and the adding of El Hajj only as a result of the pilgrimage). He also specified that with this last change he did not mean to abandon the surname X:

[222] Malcolm X, "Interview with Malcolm X, June 2, 1964," Robert Penn, *The Robert Penn Warren Oral History Archive*, June 2, 1964, available at: https://www.nunncenter.net/robertpennwarren/items/show/101 (accessed August 21, 2021).

[223] Malcolm X, "Return from Mecca Press Conference," *YouTube*, May 21, 1964, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hv80w3rCUC8 (accessed August 21, 2021).

[224] Malcolm X, "Return from Mecca Press Conference."

> My going to Mecca and going into the Muslim world, into the African world and being recognized and accepted as a Muslim and as a brother may solve the problem for me personally, but I personally feel that my personal problem is never solved as long as the problem is not solved for all of our people in this country. So I remain Malcolm X as long as there is a need to protest and struggle and fight against the injustices that our people are involved in in this country.[225]

All these comments probably disappointed those who hoped for a new conciliatory approach toward white Americans on his part. Moreover, they most likely confused all the people who up to these days hold that he returned from Mecca as a new man. The objection to this recurrent assumption was offered by Malcolm X himself on May 29, 1964, during his speech at the New York's Militant Labor Forum Hall: "Any time you do any travel," he affirmed talking about his recent experience, "your scope broaden. It does not mean you change—you broaden. No religion will ever make me forget the condition of our people in this country. […] Nothing will make me forget it until it stops, until it is finished, until it is eliminated. I want to make this point clear."[226]

Therefore, there was no ideological refoundation; if anything, what can be gathered from these words is the separation of Muslim faith and political activism, with religion that appears to be an incidental element when it came to his participation to the black struggle. To confirm this, Malcolm X declared emphatically in late 1964: "Any time I have a religion that will not let me fight for my people, I say to hell with that religion. That is why I am a Muslim."[227] In general terms, as pointed out by the American scholar Michael E. Sawyer, Islam was for Malcolm X an organizing principle for his political activity rather than "a practice for the sake of personal redemption."[228]

Further evidence of the prioritization of non-religious objectives can be found in an interview from June 2 with the journalist Robert Penn Warren, where Malcolm X stressed the importance of Islam for black people, but at the same time clarified that the most pressing concern was secular:

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[225] Malcolm X, "Return from Mecca Press Conference."

[226] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 70.

[227] Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X, p. 7.*

[228] Michael E. Sawyer, *Black Minded: The Political Philosophy of Malcolm X*, Pluto Press, London 2020, p. 119.

> The religion of Islam actually restores one's human feelings, human rights, human incentives, human, his talent. […] Now besides teaching [the black man] that Islam is the best religion, since the main problem that the Afro-Americans have is a lack of cultural identity. It is necessary to teach him that he had some type of identity, culture, civilization before he was brought here. Well, now, teaching him about his historic or cultural past is not his religion.[229]

Overall, talking only of a broadened, not new, scope is not to suggest that Malcolm X tried to minimize the changes in his race consciousness and in the way he understood race relations inside the American context. On May 23, speaking in Chicago, he declared that the Hajj made him regret his past accusation against the white population as a single unit: conscious of the fact that "these generalizations have caused injuries to some white people who did not deserve it," Malcolm X announced that from then on he would avoid making "sweeping indictments of one race" because the experience in Mecca proved to him that the white population was not irredeemably racist.[230] Still, he remained consistent with his primary focus on the black community by concluding: "My first concern is with the group of people to which I belong, the Afro-Americans, for we, more than any other people, are deprived of [human] rights."[231]

To this end (and in continuity with the claim that there was no metamorphosis post-Mecca), Malcolm X did not come to prefer a non-violent solution at his return to America: basing his arguments on the comparison between the successful Third World's violent rebellion against colonial powers and the unsuccessful non-violent tactic adopted by the Civil Rights Movement's groups, he asserted in "The Harlem 'Hate-Gang' Scare" speech[232] that the black struggle should draw inspiration from the international anti-colonial struggle, abandoning passive resistance and rising up by any means necessary, since there was no hope for the

[229] Malcolm X, "Interview with Malcolm X, June 2, 1964."

[230] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 58.

[231] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 59.

[232] The title of the speech referred to the "Blood Brothers," a gang of young African Americans accused of spreading panic in Harlem and that, according to an article of the *New York Times* from early May, was "indoctrinated in hatred of all white persons" ("The Harlem Blood Brothers," *New York Times*, May 8, 1964, p. 32). Malcolm X was blamed indirectly by the media for their crimes because apparently the gang claimed to have been affiliated with Nation of Islam, before following him after the split. Malcolm X became aware of their existence when he was in Ghana, during a dinner organized by professor Essien-Udom (Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 350). Considering the seriousness of the accusation raised by the local newspapers, the Militant Labor Forum organized a seminar under the title "What is Behind the 'Hate-Gang' Scare?" to be hold on May 29, 1964 (Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 64).

American system to "produce freedom right now for the black man in this country."[233] Such declarations, coupled with the encouragement to African Americans to take advantage of the constitutional right to arm themselves for self-defense purposes,[234] inevitably compromised Malcolm X's attempt to leave behind the public image of violent demagogue that the press attributed to him during the years spent under the Nation, which in turn complicated the creation of a large, united domestic front rallying for the concession of African Americans' legitimate rights.[235]

Remaining on "The Harlem 'Hate-Gang' Scare" speech, it is worth noting the debut of a new element of Malcolm X's ideology: the connection between racism and capitalism. Asked about what was, in his view, the ideal political and economic system to combat racism, Malcolm X cautiously began by saying he was flexible on the matter, but then, pointing out the trend of newly independent countries to adopt socialism and the fundamental role played by capitalism in the United States' domestic and foreign policy, he declared that there cannot be capitalism without racism; furthermore, in his view, people who do not practice racist behavior usually proved to be socialists.[236] Such a direct attack to capitalism in the Cold War era was symptomatic of Malcolm X's will to denounce every aspect of the American economic, political and social system in the hope of producing a radical and urgent change: presenting this concept through a metaphor, he made it clear that there was no use waiting "for a chicken to produce a duck egg."[237]

There is another important and controversial theme related to this period: Malcolm X's negative characterization of (most) white Americans, which persisted from before the foreign experience. Despite having accepted in Mecca that not all white people were racists, Malcolm X was convinced that in America the "sincere, well-meaning, good" whites were largely outnumbered by their racist peers, against whom the black population must continue to fight "by any means that are necessary."[238] What he witnessed in the Middle East could not be translated into the domestic context because racism and the feeling of superiority were rooted

[233] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, pp. 68-69.

[234] Malcolm X, "Interview with Mike Wallace," Mike Wallace, *YouTube*, June 8, 1964, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUoM5yOadHA (accessed on August 21, 2021).

[235] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, pp. 332-333.

[236] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 69.

[237] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 68.

[238] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 367.

in the white American population's collective subconsciousness,[239] meaning that even without classifying all whites as devils anymore (accordingly to the Islamic principle that they must be judged on the basis of their actions and not of their complexion), Malcolm X still approached the black struggle in natural and general terms: "Here in the United States," he reflected in the *Autobiography*, "notwithstanding those few 'good' white people, it is the collective 150 million white people whom the collective black people have to deal with!"[240] Adding to this, he denounced the hypocritical American society as "a society that might preach [brotherhood] on Sunday, but do not practice [it] on no day."[241]

All in all, Malcolm X's analysis was realistic but negative: the African Americans were still outnumbered and systematically oppressed, collective brotherhood was unachievable since even white people who desired it might have been unconsciously racist, the majority black population was still pursuing justice in the domestic jurisdiction instead of bringing their case to the United Nations, and the widespread faith in Christianity prevented the diffusion of Islam and its principle of color-blind brotherhood.[242] These conclusions are mostly coherent with what he had reached before leaving for Mecca; still, the insights Malcolm X gained abroad (especially in the predominantly religious phase of the trip) influenced the way he presented his overall approach to race relations: "I am not a racist," he declared in one of his first interviews back in America, "I am not condemning whites for being whites, but for their deeds. I condemn what whites collectively have done to our people collectively."[243]

The second subject of this section is the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). Despite being established in late June 1964, the conception of the organization preceded Malcolm X's departure in April: Sherwood gathered the testimony of Abdullah Abdur-Razzaq (a former Black Muslim who followed Malcolm X after his break with the Nation), who recalled that Malcolm X held him responsible for the creation of the OAAU before leaving for Mecca and he expected to have it ready by the time of his return.[244] Abdur-Razzaq also added: "It is easy to see that even before he left for Hajj, Malcolm X planned to establish political ties with

[239] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 362-363.

[240] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 362.

[241] Rufus Burrow Jr., "Malcolm X Was Not a Racist," in Candice Mancini, ed., *Racism in the Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Greenhaven Press, Detroit 2009, pp. 101-114, p. 111.

[242] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 364.

[243] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 413.

[244] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 17.

the African continent through the OAAU with the OAU [Organization of African Unity]."[245] This account is confirmed by the Ghanaian journalist Cameron Duodu, to whom Malcolm X told on May 14 that he would soon be starting an organization to cooperate with the OAU. On top of this plan, Duodu reported Malcolm X's vision for the organization as he presented it to him:

> Just as the OAU contained both white and Arab African as well as black Africans, the OAAU would seek coalitions with all areas of the world where the people, irrespective of their colour, were opposed to racial discrimination and imperialist domination.
>
> The OAAU would establish fraternal relations with the Arab League and with the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation. The African-Americans would keep these organisations informed of what the American government was doing, or not doing, about racial discrimination in the US, and in that way, the US government would not be able to lie to the rest of the world that it wanted friendly relations with all people, irrespective of colour—the message the US State Department sought to convey to the world.
>
> In the immediate future, the OAAU would seek the assistance of its friends in the UN to lay a complaint against the US for its violation of the human rights of African-Americans.[246]

The account offered by the Ghanaian journalist appears in line with the project Malcolm X would realize in the following months, which means that he already had a fairly defined plan for his organization in mid-May, one week before his return. This, combined with the order he gave to Abdur-Razzaq and his other followers, made it possible for him to accelerate the realization of the OAAU and formally establish it on June 28, 1964.[247]

Four days prior, Malcolm X had distributed an invitation letter in which anticipated his project: the OAAU was "patterned after the letter and the spirit" of the OAU and aimed at creating a united front of African Americans as a way to gain leverage in the black struggle for

[245] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 17.

[246] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 47.

[247] William W. Sales Jr., *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation: Malcolm X and the Organization of Afro-American Unity*, South End Press, Boston 1994, p. 104.

human rights.[248] More about the objectives was unveiled the day of the founding rally at the Audubon Ballroom in New York, when the "Statement of Basic Aims and Objectives of the Organization of Afro-American Unity" was read and commented publicly. Drawing inspiration from the OAU, Malcolm X listed the organization's core principles:

> To fight whoever gets in [the African Americans'] way, to bring about the complete independence of people of African descent here in the Western Hemisphere, and first here in the United States, and bring about the freedom of these people by any means necessary.[249]

Malcolm X proceeded with a consideration about his identity as a black man in America: after having refused to define himself as American in the past (rather, he thought of himself "one of the twenty-two million black people who are victims of Americanism"),[250] he now took a further step forward by explaining to his black audience that since white people in America call themselves Irish, Italian, German, etc. according to their European heritage, they too should consider themselves Africans.[251] This was a message through which Malcolm X sought to restore his people's racial pride and to encourage unity, as he reiterated one more time how important was for African Americans to put aside their differences and look at each other as people who shared the same heritage and purpose.

About the achievement of unity, it is important to notice that the OAAU was conceived "around a non-religious and non-sectarian constructive program for Human Rights,"[252] a lesson that Malcolm X learned from his experience with the Muslim Mosque Inc.: in retrospect, it is generally held that this religious organization did not turn out to be as successful as he wished because, in Goldman's words, "it was an hybrid, too worldly for some of the old Muslims and too religious to bring in either the first-class leaders or the mass following."[253]

Overall, the "Statement of Basic Aims and Objectives of the Organization of Afro-American Unity" underlined five key aspects: the constitutional right to self-defense against

[248] Sales, *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation*, pp. 106-107.
[249] George Breitman, ed., *By Any Means Necessary*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1992, p. 59.
[250] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 26.
[251] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 59.
[252] Sales, *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation*, p. 107.
[253] Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 189.

white supremacists (which for all Malcolm X's career has been interpreted as an incentive to violence), the importance of education as the mean through which African Americans can recover their identity and consequently their self-respect, the black nationalist's belief that the black community must control its economic and political power (even though it is curious to notice that the charter never cites directly black nationalism),[254] the decision to forbid white people from joining and even contribute financially to the organization (a choice that differentiates the OAAU from the Muslim Mosque Inc., where "sincere whites" were allowed to give money to support the black struggle), and the need for a cultural revolution as "the mean of bringing us closer to our African brothers and sisters."[255]

The last two points are particularly important when discussing race consciousness and race relations: for the former, Malcolm X stressed at the OAAU Founding Rally that the organization's only responsibility was the African American people and it would not accept external support because, he believed, the black communities "must be the sources of their own strength politically, economically, intellectually and culturally in the struggle for human rights and dignity."[256] The word to underline here is dignity: by pairing it with human rights as the black struggle's targets, Malcolm X was once again bringing to the forefront of his projects the "psychological castration" suffered by the African Americans as a consequence of "years of exploitation, neglect, and apathy."[257]

Malcolm X continued this theme in discussing the second element: culture. He believed that black Americans had lost it when they were enslaved and deported to the New World, so he addressed this issue at the OAAU Founding Rally along with another criticism of the term "Negro":

> We must recapture our heritage and our identity if we are ever to liberate ourselves from the bonds of white supremacy. We must launch a cultural

[254] This absence is probably attributable to the reflections that followed Malcolm's interaction with the Algerian Ambassador in Ghana, which has been presented in the previous chapter. Talking about it during the interview with the *Young Socialist* of January 18, 1965, Malcolm admitted: "I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of Black nationalism. […] And if you notice, I have not been using the expression for several months. But I still would be hard pressed to give a specific definition of the overall philosophy which I think is necessary for the liberation of the Black people in this country" (Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, pp. 119-120).

[255] Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X*, p. 111.

[256] Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X*, p. 109.

[257] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 76.

> revolution to unbrainwash an entire people. […] This cultural revolution will be the journey to our rediscovery of ourselves. History is a people's memory, and without a memory man is demoted to the level of the lower animals.
> When you have no knowledge of your history, you are just another animal; in fact, you are a Negro; something that is nothing. The only black man on earth who is called a Negro is one who has no knowledge of his history [and] who does not know where he came from. That is the one in America. They do not call Africans Negroes. […] You are Negro because you do not know who you are, you do not know what you are, you do not know where you are, and you do not know how you got here. But as soon as you wake up and find out the positive answer to all these things, you cease being a Negro. You become somebody.[258]

What can be gathered from this segment of the speech is a confirmation of how consciousness was always an indispensable element in Malcolm X's vision of the black struggle. Then, similarly to the invite of returning psychologically and not physically to Africa, Malcolm X linked again the old African roots to the black people's reawakening and ultimately freedom. Furthermore, it is evident that after his trip in Africa (in particular on the occasion in which he was suggested to prefer "African American" over "Negro" since the former had greater dignity),[259] Malcolm X's criticism of the term "Negro" was becoming harsher, to the point of interpreting it as the equivalent of being an animal or being nothing at all. This consideration about terminology is also important because, contrary to its current racist connotation, "Negro" was the most common term used to refer to people of dark complexion in America up until the late Sixties.[260]

In sum, Malcolm X founded two organizations in less than four months from his break with the Nation. Once he OAAU took shape, its leadership became his priority over the Muslim Mosque Inc., and by comparing the aims of the two organizations, it would be hard to argue otherwise: indeed, the Muslim Mosque Inc.'s goal was "to create an atmosphere and facilities in which people who are interested in Islam can get a better understanding of Islam," while the OAAU had the mission of using "whatever means necessary to bring about a society in which

[258] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 77-79.

[259] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 354.

[260] Tom W. Smith, "Changing Racial Labels: From 'Colored' to 'Negro' to 'Black' to 'African American,'" *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, LVI, 4 (1992), pp. 496-514, p. 497.

the twenty-two million Afro-Americans are recognized and respected as human beings."[261] In light of this and given how much the black struggle meant for Malcolm X, he could have never favored his religious program over the secular one. Moreover, a specific event planned for the summer of 1964 made the OAAU an essential platform, as Malcolm X revealed during the second OAAU rally, on June 5:

> One of the first acts of business of the Organization of Afro-American Unity is to organize the type of program that is necessary to take your and my case into the United Nations. Not only into the United Nations, but also we need to take it before every international body that sits on this earth. The Organization of African Unity, which consists of thirty-three independent African heads of state, will meet in Cairo on July 17. We should be there letting them know that we are catching hell in America.[262]

Adopting the argument that the black American was actually African, which in his mind legitimized the OAAU participation at the OAU meeting, Malcolm X chose to leave in five days for Cairo. This represented the start of a five-month international trip in which Malcolm X lobbied for the recognition of the African American human rights through his new organization.

In addition to this goal, there was another motivation behind Malcolm X's departure: the Nation of Islam's higher ranks wanted him dead. In Mecca, Malcolm X realized that revering Elijah Muhammad as a divine and irreproachable figure had been improper in light of his misconducts and, according to the orthodox Muslim doctrine, his blasphemous and unfounded claim of being the messenger of Allah. What is more, elevating him to such high position was dangerous, since it created a situation in which his followers looked up to him as a spiritual leader who could not possibly do anything wrong.[263] Consequently, given his hopes for the spread of orthodox Islam's principles in America, Malcolm X concluded that he could not restrain himself: "I am for justice, no matter who it is for or against," he declared before returning to the United States, when he decided that he needed to expose Elijah Muhammad's

[261] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 119.
[262] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 110.
[263] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 365.

immorality and the threats he received from the Nation's members. Furthermore, there was also a practical problem to worsen Malcolm X's already conflictual relationship with the Nation: the order of eviction that the latter directed to Malcolm X and his family, who at the time lived in a house in Queen, New York. The dispute arose from the fact that the Muslim organization claimed its ownership, while Malcolm X argued that the Nation bought him the house when he was a minister in New York's temple.[264]

Malcolm X stepped up his criticism progressively: the day of his return, May 21, he avoided talking of the Nation with the reporters, but he did so by saying he was not willing "to discuss the movement of the honorable Elijah Muhammad in any way."[265] This shows that initially not only did he avoid accusing his former mentor, but he even referred to him as "honorable." A more critical approach can be seen in the early June interview with Warren: in this occasion, he explained that his separation from the Nation went from being just physical to becoming psychological when he travelled abroad, a transition that opened his eyes and allowed him to regain his judgment, so that he "could look at it more objectively and separate that which was good from that which was bad."[266] Still, there was no direct accusation to the Muslim organization and its leader, but Malcolm X would soon adopt an unequivocally confrontational stance.

On June 8, Malcolm X talked candidly of Elijah Muhammad's sex scandal and the danger he was in since leaving the Nation. He admitted of having defended Muhammad for long mostly because he was worried of the consequences his discrediting would have on the believers: "The image that he had created," Malcolm X explained, "was the image that enabled his followers to remain strong in faith and things of that sort and I did not want to see any adverse effect or negative result develop in the faith of all of his followers."[267] In spite of this, what he received in return from the Black Muslims were only accusations and threats. Therefore, during his trip in the Muslim world, Malcolm X decided "that something had to be done to bring [the truth] to light otherwise a whole lot of innocent people would be killed needlessly."[268] He went on to talk about Elijah Muhammad's adulterous relationships with his teenage secretaries (from whom he also had multiple illegitimate children), something he became aware of in 1963, when

[264] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 227.
[265] Malcolm X, "Return from Mecca Press Conference."
[266] Malcolm X, "Interview with Malcolm X, June 2, 1964."
[267] Malcolm X, "Interview with Mike Wallace."
[268] Malcolm X, "Interview with Mike Wallace."

Elijah's son Wallace revealed it to him, causing both to be expelled from the Nation as its officials feared the public disclosure of the facts.

The antagonism of these officials did not manifest simply in diminishing Malcolm X's authority and eventually removing him from the Nation: already in January, they had attempted to assassin him, but in that occasion the Black Muslim who was put in charge to kill him eventually pulled back.[269] Unveiling publicly Elijah Muhammad's adultery could not possibly have helped moving toward a détente, and Malcolm X was fully aware of it. As he admitted during the interview:

> I probably am a dead man already. When […] you understand the makeup of the Muslim movement and the psychology of the Muslim movement, […] if I myself and by having confidence in the leader of the Muslim movement if someone came to me and I had no knowledge whatsoever of what had taken place and they told me what I am saying, I would kill him myself. The only thing that would prevent me from killing someone who made a statement like this, they would have to be able to let me know that it is true. Now if anyone had come to me other than Mr Mohammed son I never would have believed it even enough to look into it, but I had been around him so closely I had seen indications of the reality of it, but my religious sincerity made me block it out of my mind.[270]

Finally unleashed, Malcolm X continued his accusation discussing the failure of the Nation's contribution to the black struggle and its followers' unjustifiable violence:

> Elijah Muhammad gave no signal to anybody across the nation to come to the defense of their brothers. […] The only times the Muslims have ever been given any instructions to commit violence is when is when that violence is directed against the fellow Muslim […] his followers are violent against Negros, […] but you do not find those same followers going out and becoming involved in the Negro struggle in any way whatsoever.[271]

[269] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 227.
[270] Malcolm X, "Interview with Mike Wallace."
[271] Malcolm X, "Interview with Mike Wallace."

In the month that followed these declarations, Malcolm X and his followers were subjected to multiple attacks and death threats, which pushed him to write directly to Elijah Muhammad in an attempt to deescalate the conflict. On a letter dated June 23, Malcolm X accused him of remaining impassive in front of the black-on-black violence that the Nation's ministers were ordering in retaliation for the accusations moved against him. After warning Elijah Muhammad that "any bloodshed committed by Muslims against Muslims will compel the writers of history to declare you guilty not only of adultery and deceit, but also of murder,"[272] Malcolm X concluded the letter with a call for truce:

> Instead of wasting all of this energy fighting each other, we should be working in unity and harmony with other leaders and organizations in an effort to solve the very serious problems facing all Afro-Americans. Historians would then credit us with intelligence and sincerity.[273]

Despite unity between all black organizations (putting aside religious and political beliefs and the different methodological approach of the groups) was one of Malcolm X's mantras especially after becoming an independent leader, it would appear that this last message was more a non-aggression pact than an actual invite to cooperation: Malcolm X knew too well the Nation's psychology, which he had contributed heavily to shape throughout the previous twelve years, to sincerely hope for a change of mind on Elijah Muhammad's part.

Five days after writing the letter, Malcolm X said at the OAAU Founding Rally that he wanted to avoid conflicts with the Black Muslims because they "are my brothers still" and "there is no benefit in it."[274] Then the next week, after having escaped another aggression by four black men armed with knives, Malcolm X declared at the second OAAU rally: "Right now, things are pretty hot for me, […] I am trying to stay alive, you understand."[275] There was not much to do at this point but disappearing for a while: on July 9, Malcolm X headed to the airport of New York and fled to London.

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[272] Louis A. DeCaro, *Malcolm and the Cross: The Nation of Islam, Malcolm X, and Christianity*, New York University Press, New York 1998, p. 222.

[273] DeCaro, *Malcolm and the Cross*, p. 222.

[274] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 89.

[275] Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 204.

Second Travel to the Middle East (July−September 1964)

In all fairness, the travel was not motivated simply by the need to escape the Nation's threats: Marable explained that, at this point of his life, Malcolm X "had reached a point where his own physical safety was secondary to the realization of his political objectives."[276] Therefore, the establishment of alliances between the OAAU and the independent African countries in the name of Pan-Africanism, with the ultimate goal of bringing the United States' government before the United Nations for its violation of the black Americans' human rights, is to be considered the main reason behind Malcolm X's eighteen-week sojourn in Africa and the Middle East.

Contrary to the long presentation of the experience in April and May, the *Autobiography* covers only a few episodes of this second international trip and does so without ever going into detail; on the other hand, the travel journal is a thorough source that documents the events almost on a daily basis. Then, compared to the first trip of 1964, the second one appears to have been more a formative than a revolutionary religious experience, since in April Malcolm X sought to embrace orthodox Islam, while later in the year his main goal was to solidify his Muslim faith. On the political side, the tour that started in July took place mainly on a formal and institutional setting: in fact, the linking of the black American and African struggles was pursued through the representation of the newly founded OAAU, not only through private receptions and informal meetings (which represented the main avenues of his previous tour). Using Goldman's words, the second travel of 1964 was "a VIP tour down the corridors of power of a third of the then independent nations of Africa."[277] Overall, it can be anticipated that there was no ground-breaking spiritual revelation or a drastic evolution in Malcolm X's race consciousness and understanding of racial relations during his second sojourn.

Malcolm X spent the initial period abroad in the Middle East and then toured Africa, visiting fourteen nations and discussing with religious leaders and heads of state of the caliber of Gamal Abdel Nasser and Kwame Nkrumah,[278] two inspiring figures for Malcolm X and two key symbols of the mid-Twentieth century's Third World Non-Aligned and Pan-Africanist

[276] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 358.
[277] Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 213.
[278] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 370.

movements.[279] Before flying to Cairo, Malcolm X spent one day in London, where, according to an article from the *New York Times*, he intended "to confer with Muslim ministers and Commonwealth governments attending the Commonwealth conference."[280] The newspaper also specified his intention to make a second pilgrimage to Mecca and to ask the support of the African heads of state in bringing the black Americans' case to the United Nations.[281] Accordingly, Malcolm X arrived in Cairo the night between July 11 and 12 for a long sojourn that was motivated above all by the holding of the OAU's second annual conference and the second Arab Summit Conference, two events he attended as representative and chairman of the OAAU.

Since the OAAU was conceived as an organization "patterned after the letter and spirit" of the OAU, Malcolm X's presence at the African conference deserves particular attention:[282] held in Cairo between July 17 and 21 at the presence of more than thirty African leaders, the conference represented for Malcolm X the ideal context for his lobbying campaign against the American government. Initially, however, his presence was at risk: on July 15, he noted in his diary that "there [was] a real debate going on backstage at this conference as to whether [he] should be admitted or heard."[283] Eventually he was accepted, but just with the status of observer, which only allowed him to submit an eight-page memorandum to the African delegates in attendance.

Delivered on July 17, the memorandum was conceived as an appeal to the African heads of state to mobilize against the United States' government unfair treatment of the black population. More in detail, its reading demonstrates that Malcolm X wanted above all to stress two points: the intertwining of American and African struggles and the denounce of the attempts

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[279] Non-alignment is a policy through which a state seeks to avoid involvement in large-scale, international conflicts. It inspired the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, an organization that "called for a lowering of Cold War tensions and for greater attention to be paid to underdevelopment and to the eradication of imperialism" (Best et al., *International History of the Twentieth Century and Beyond*, p. 646).

[280] In his diary, however, Malcolm X did not reference any meeting with Commonwealth governments' representatives: in the approximately twenty-four hours spent in London, he said he attended a press conference at a local mosque (in which he "took time to explain the 'plight' of the [twenty-two] million Afro Americans, emphasizing that the U.S. government was violating the UN Charter by violating our basic human rights"), taped interviews at a British station and discussed with Africans he met at his hotel ("Malcolm X to Meet Leaders of Africa," *New York Times*, July 10, 1964, p. 26; and Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, locations 905-923).

[281] "Malcolm X to Meet Leaders of Africa," p. 26.

[282] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 60.

[283] According to Sherwood, behind this effort to prevent Malcolm X's participation there was the American Embassy in Cairo (Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 1093; and Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 77).

by the United States' agencies to cover up the plight of the African American population. Malcolm X opened by presenting himself as the representative of the OAAU and, most importantly, of "the interests of 22 million African Americans whose human rights are being violated daily by the racism of American imperialists."[284] Then, by recalling their common roots, he persuaded the African leaders not to focus only on their continent's affairs and ignore the black Americans' suffering: as Malcolm X repeated multiple times during this short address, "African problems are our problems and our problems are African problems."[285] He continued:

> With all due respect to your esteemed positions, I must remind all of you that the good shepherd will leave ninety nine sheep, who are safe at home, to go to the aid of the one who is lost and has fallen into the clutches of the imperialist wolf. We, in America, are your long-lost brothers and sisters, and I am here only to remind you that our problems are your problems. As the African-Americans "awaken" today, we find ourselves in a strange land that has rejected us, and, like the prodigal son, we are turning to our elder brothers for help. We pray our pleas will not fall upon deaf ears.[286]

It can be seen how important was for Malcolm X to stress the theme of solidarity (and even pity) in his message. Moreover, it is curious to notice the use of the typically Christian parable of the lost sheep in an attempt to convey the African Americans' situation, considering that he had talked of Christianity as a religion "infected with racism."[287] Still, this should not be interpreted as a change of heart on Malcolm X's part: as it has been specified many times by now, black unity was an objective that transcended political and religious differences, so the fact that he conveyed the message using a Christian language does not deny his Muslim faith or his disdain for Christianity.

Malcolm X proceeded with his appeal to the African leaders and got to the main point of his plea:

[284] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 73.
[285] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 73.
[286] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 73.
[287] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 368.

> [Ours] is not a Negro problem, nor an American problem. This is a world problem; a problem for humanity. It is not a problem of civil rights but a problem of human rights. […] [W]hat makes our African brothers hesitate to bring the United States government before the United Nations and charge her with violating the human rights of [twenty-two] million African-Americans?
> We pray that our African brothers have not freed themselves of European colonialism only to be overcome and held in check now by American *dollarism*. Do not let American racism be "legalized" by American dollarism.[288]

Besides the usual call for extending the black struggle to involve human rights internationally and bringing the African Americans' case to the United Nations' tribunal, Malcolm X underlined the dangers of American influence: by describing the United States as "the century's leading neo-colonialist power" and as a country that was not only racist, but also deceitful and hypocritical, Malcolm X was trying to convince the African leaders to subordinate their geopolitical interests in the name of black solidarity. This was particularly important because, as he had already denounced during the previous travel, the foreign perception of the African Americans' plight was being purposely distorted by American officials: a few days before the OAU meeting, Malcolm X wrote in his diary that despite the sympathy showed by all the African delegates, "American propaganda thru the USIS [United States Information Service] has been powerful influencing most of them to think we hate Africa and do not identify with her in any way. Most of them are shocked by my strongly pro-African sentiments."[289] Then, returning from the summit on July 19, he also noted that "all the heads of state [seemed] to avoid mentioning the US and its racism":[290] in Malcolm X's understanding, highly publicized resolutions promoting a more equitable treatment of the black population (such as the Civil Rights Act) were part of the American government's deceitful propaganda to prevent the African countries from condemning its racist domestic practices,[291] so he deemed necessary to

[288] Emphasis reported as in the original text (Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 75).

[289] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 1976.

[290] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 1111.

[291] This was not just the impression of Malcolm X: many scholars have documented the American officials' attempts to pursue such strategy during the Cold War years. Thomas Borstelmann, for example, discusses this topic in the book *The Cold War and the Color Line*, in which he also offers a complete analysis of the post-World War II American foreign policy in relation to African anti-colonialist uprisings and the domestic Civil Rights Movement *(*Borstelmann Thomas, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2001).

address this subterfuge inside the memorandum. Given its importance, Malcolm X closed the memorandum by reiterating this message:

> One last word, my beloved brothers at this African summit: no one knows the master better than his servant. We have been servants in America for over 300 years. We have a thorough, inside knowledge of this man who calls himself "Uncle Sam." Therefore, you must heed our warning: do not escape from European colonialism only to become even more enslaved by deceitful, "friendly" American dollarism.[292]

In response to Malcolm X's plea, the African leaders passed a resolution in which they denounced the "continuing manifestations of racial bigotry and racial oppression against Negro citizens of the United States of America" and reaffirmed their concern on the matter, urging the American authorities "to intensify their efforts to ensure the total elimination of all forms of discrimination based on race, color, or ethnic origin."[293] Nonetheless, considering that the OAU members did not start any investigation after the resolution, there have been contrasting opinions on whether Malcolm X's appeal was actually successful: for instance, Essien-Udom believed it was "a decided success" since the resolution was followed by many delegates' promises to support the OAAU,[294] while Breitman claimed that the positive results of Malcolm X's lobbying were evident in the Africans' denunciation of the American involvement in Congo during the nineteenth session of the United Nations General Assembly in December 1964.[295] On the other hand, Breitman also admitted that "the actual wording of the resolution was moderate,"[296] while Curtis similarly described the African response as tepid[297] and the American scholar Charles Lewis Nier III thought that Malcolm X's plea was "moderately rewarded with a carefully worded declaration."[298] In any case, Malcolm X appeared to be more

[292] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 77.

[293] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 76.

[294] R. Essien-Udom and E. U. Essien-Udom, "Malcolm X: An International Man," p. 255.

[295] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 87.

[296] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 84.

[297] Curtis, "My Heart Is in Cairo," p. 787.

[298] Charles Lewis Nier III, "Guilty as Charged: Malcolm X and His Vision of Racial Justice for African Americans Through Utilization of the United Nations International Human Rights Provisions and Institutions," *Penn State International Law Review*, XVI, 1 (1997), pp. 149-189, p. 158.

than satisfied with the outcome: interviewed by Milton Henry after the OAU summit, he believed that the African delegates had passed "a very good resolution" and, moreover, the promises of assistance he obtained led him to conclude that conference was overall "an unqualified success, and one which should change the whole direction of our struggle in America for human dignity as well as human rights."[299]

This initiative, and more in general the persistent lobbying against American racism and the attempts to keep the black struggles of the two continents separated, did not go unnoticed in Washington D.C. On August 12, an article from the *New York Times* stated:

> The State Department and the Justice Department have begun to take an interest in Malcolm X's campaign to convince African states to raise the question of persecution of American Negroes at the United Nations.
> […] After studying [the eight-page memorandum], officials said that if Malcolm succeeded in convincing just one African Government to bring up the charge at the United Nations, the United States Government would be faced with a touchy problem.
> The United States officials here believe, would find itself in the same category as South Africa, Hungary and other countries whose domestic politics have become debating issues at the United Nations. The issue, officials say, would be of service to critics of the United States, communist and non-Communist, and contribute to the undermining of the position the United States has asserted, for itself as the leader of West in the advocacy of human rights.[300]

Malcolm X knew of the federal agencies' interest in him, as he documented in the *Autobiography* that he was aware he had been under surveillance during all his trip.[301] However, it is not sure whether at the time he knew the actual degree of attention the American officials paid on his foreign activities: in fact, the American Embassy in Cairo and the United States Information Service had been following him even before his appearance at the OAU conference, while the Department of Justice conducted investigations from the American

[299] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 79, 84.

[300] Michael S. Handler, "Malcolm X Seeks U.N. Negro Debate: He Asks African States to Cite U.S. Over Rights," *New York Times*, August 13, 1964, p. 22.

[301] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 371.

territory.[302] What undoubtedly raised Malcolm X's suspicion was the controversial episode of July 23, when he was rushed to the hospital after having eaten food contaminated with a toxic substance: Malcolm X affirmed that the doctors confirmed it was not a regular food poisoning and, most disturbingly, that he recognized the waiter who served him as someone he had already seen in New York. If this was not enough, the day after the incident the waiter was nowhere to be found.[303] Years later, Malcolm X's half-sister Ella recalled that he was convinced the Central Intelligence Agency was behind the poisoning.[304]

In spite of this episode and his growing paranoia (and probably in fear of the Nation's revenge once back home), Malcolm X chose to remain in Egypt until September. In these two months, he continued the lobbying campaign in as many forums as possible, both political (the Second African Summit Conference, the Chinese embassy in Alexandria, a private meeting with President Nasser, another one with the Palestine Liberation Organization's leader Ahmad Al Shukary, and many more) and religious (the Muslim Youth Association, the Young Men's Muslim Association, the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, etc.).[305] In an article from late August, the *Arab Observer* recapped Malcolm X's interactions during his Middle Easter sojourn:

> [He] met and talked at length with many of Africa's most influential leaders. He divided his time between the Conference Hall, and the lobbies of Cairo's hotels which housed the delegates. […] Since the [OAU] Conference he has been in almost daily contact with religious leaders and teachers [and] numberless persons of all walks of life in Cairo. […] Malcolm can count on the whole-hearted support of the [United Arab Republic], its Government, its people and its leader, Gamal Abdul Nasser.[306]

Moreover, the same article explained that behind Malcolm X's extended stay in Egypt there was also the intention to strengthen his Muslim faith: in fact, as Goldman phrased it, he departed

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[302] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, pp. 82-83.

[303] Carew Jan, *Ghosts in Our Blood: With Malcolm X in Africa, England, and the Caribbean*, Lawrence Hill Books, Chicago 1994, p. 39.

[304] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 85.

[305] Alex Lubin, "Between the Secular and the Sectarian: Malcolm X's Afro-Arab Political Imaginary," *Journal of Africana Religions*, III, 1 (2015), pp. 83-95, p. 90; and Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, pp. 88-92.

[306] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, pp. 79, 87.

for his second trip of 1964 "surprisingly sophisticated in politics and naïve as a child in Islam."[307] While the experience in the Middle East of April and May allowed Malcolm X to abandon his past as a Black Muslim, in late August he announced to the *Egyptian Gazette* (a newspaper edited by David Graham Du Bois, the stepson of W.E.B. Du Bois) that he was "trying to live the life of a true Sunni Muslim."[308] To this end, he attended Al-Ahzar University in Cairo, which in September appointed him Muslim missionary, and later in the month he travelled to Mecca to make a second pilgrimage.[309] Furthermore, as reported in a letter from Mecca dated September 23, Malcolm X announced that after a long period of training, the World Muslim League proclaimed him an official Muslim representative in the United States.[310] These acknowledgments from two prestigious Islamic institutions were undoubtedly important for the spiritual development of Malcolm X, but also for his role in America as a Muslim missionary: indeed, he obtained the credentials to preach Sunni Islam and to open an Islamic center in New York, plus the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs and the World Muslim League granted more than thirty scholarships to his American followers who wished to train respectively in Cairo and Mecca.[311]

The day before he communicated all these achievements, Malcolm X had written another noteworthy letter in which he reflected on his past as a Black Muslim in light of his new and enhanced religious awareness, attacking Elijah Muhammad as a "religious faker":

> For twelve long years I lived within the narrow-minded confines of the "strait-jacked world" created by my strong belief that Elijah Muhammad was a messenger direct from God Himself, and my faith in what I now see to be a pseudoreligious philosophy that he preaches. […]
> I shall never rest until I have undone the harm I did to so many well-meaning, innocent Negroes who through my own evangelistic zeal now believe in him even more fanatically and more blindly than I did. […]

[307] Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 209.

[308] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 77.

[309] Curtis, "My Heart Is in Cairo," p. 792.

[310] The World Muslim League is an organization whose function is to "coordinate all other [Islamic] organizations and produce a greater degree of cooperation in the Muslim world" ("Malcolm X Reports He Now Represents World Muslim Unit," *New York Times*, October 11, 1964, p. 13).

[311] L. Payne and T. Payne, *The Dead Are Arising*, pp. 450-451.

> I declare emphatically that […] I am a Muslim in the most orthodox sense; my religion is Islam as it is believed in and practiced by the Muslims here in the Holy City of Mecca. […]
> I totally reject Elijah Muhammad's racist philosophy, which he has labelled "Islam" only to fool and misuse gullible people.[312]

This denunciation was unprecedented: in the interview with Wallace in early June, the public attack to the Nation had targeted Elijah Muhammad's immorality; now, Malcolm X was aiming at the foundation of the "pseudoreligious" organization. Because this letter was sent to the journalist Michael S. Handler, and thus was intended to go public, it can be assumed that Malcolm X was completely aware of the risks he was getting into, since such an open affront would have inevitably compromised even more his safety back in America: as revealed by a subsequent *New York Times*' article covering the story, the Nation's representatives were waiting his return to the United States and their violent retaliation against him, they assured, was inevitable.[313]

In addition to the previous accusations, the letter included other interesting passages: among these, Malcolm X reiterated his hope for unity by writing that, despite his Muslim faith, "some of my dearest friends are Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, agnostic, and even atheist—some are capitalists, Socialists and Communists—some are moderates, conservatives, extremists—some are even Uncle Toms."[314] Given his long-standing disdain especially toward the last group of people, the message is indicative of Malcolm X's ever-increasing adherence to Islam and in particular to its rejection of prejudice: "This religion," continues the letter, "accepts all human beings […] as equal members in the Human Family of Mankind [and] it takes all these religious, political, economic, psychological and racial ingredients to make the Human Family and the Human Society complete."[315]

In sum, it can be seen how the Muslim faith shared with the political objective the essential element of unity, so that the Islamic education Malcolm X was undergoing at the time probably

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[312] Michael S. Handler, "Malcolm Rejects Racist Doctrine: Also Denounces Elijah As a Religious 'Faker,'" *New York Times*, October 4, 1964, p. 59.

[313] "Malcolm's Plans Irk Muslims Here: He Is Denounced As His Return Is Awaited," *New York Times*, November 8, 1964, p. 48.

[314] Handler, "Malcolm Rejects Racist Doctrine," p. 59.

[315] Handler, "Malcolm Rejects Racist Doctrine," p. 59.

contributed to further convince him of the soundness of the project he was trying to realize during this trip (that is, creating an international black front to bring the African American case to the United Nation). As the scholar Adil Ahmed argued, "Malcolm X's renewed faith offered him a philosophical guide and an organizational identity to further his mission, rather than an escape from his sense of earthly responsibility through personal salvation."[316]

In conclusion of this period of religious studies and following the intense lobbying efforts in Egypt, Malcolm X made two short visits to Kuwait and Lebanon and then, on September 29, flied to Khartoum, Sudan, to start his African tour.[317]

Second Travel to Africa (September−November 1964)

Malcolm X's African journey was quite stressful since it involved long travels, visits to numerous countries and an intense schedule, which furthermore was subject to frequent revisions. In general, the study of the entire second international trip of 1964 is complicated by the fact that its overall duration changed multiple times: Malcolm X left New York on July 10 for what was supposed to be a six-week trip,[318] but already in early August he wrote to his wife Betty that he would be back sometime in September because he thought that further networking in Egypt "would yield dividends in the long run" and that spending time away would help him reflect on his Muslim and African identity.[319] Then, in a letter dated August 29, Malcolm X communicated to his followers that he was about to leave Egypt, but he would not return home for at least another month.[320] At the end of September he departed for Africa, where he remained until November since he wanted to avoid being in the United States during the presidential election's period: more specifically, the American Embassy in Tanzania provided the following summary of an interview to a local newspaper on October 13 where Malcolm X explained his choice to prolong his sojourn:

> He does not intend [to] return [to the United States] before elections and [he] does not wish [to] become involved as his presence in America at election time

[316] Ahmed, "Islam and Black America," p. 477.
[317] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 1671.
[318] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 417.
[319] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, pp. 361-362.
[320] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 134.

> might cause demonstrations beneficial to Goldwater. On the other hand, any comments he might make would not help Johnson. [The] choice is only between [the] lesser of two evils.[321]

Altogether, Malcolm X's sojourn in Africa lasted around two months, from late September to late November, and included meetings with eleven African heads of state.[322] His declared purpose for the tour was consistently that of "visiting and speaking in person with various African leaders […], giving them a firsthand knowledge and understanding of the [African Americans'] problems, so that they will see, without reservation, the necessity of bringing our problem before the United Nations this year."[323] Not surprisingly, then, his speeches and interactions became more about black solidarity and neo-colonialism than religion.

Malcolm X noted in his diary that in September 29 he travelled from Kuwait to Beirut, and then flew from Lebanon's capital to Sudan. He did not spend more than twenty-four hours there, but nonetheless he was surprised by the fact that Sudanese people were not "ashamed of black, nor of using the word."[324] "I never cease to be impressed by the Sudanese," he commented after leaving the country.[325]

The next day Malcolm X was in Ethiopia, where he was again positively impressed by the locals, who he described as polite and proud people. In line with his theory of "psychological castration" developed by black people who suffered many years of racist and colonial

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[321] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 108. The 1964 election was held on November 3, when the Democratic candidate Lyndon B. Johnson (who had succeeded John F. Kennedy following his assassination) won 486 electoral votes against the 52 of his opponent, the Republican Senator Barry Goldwater; in particular, 96 percent of the black vote was in favor of Johnson. Two months earlier, Malcolm X had said this about the two candidates: "Since these are the choices, the black man in America, I think, only needs to pick which one he chooses to be eaten by, because both will eat him." The *New York Times*' article from September that covered this comment concluded that Malcolm X must have preferred the Republican candidate, because he believed that with him the black population "would at least know they were fighting an honestly growling wolf, rather than a fox [Johnson] who could not have them in his stomach and have digested them before they even knew what is happening." Still, it does not appear that Malcolm X wished either candidate to win: throughout the years, he was consistent in denouncing both the Republican and the Democratic party for their inability (or unwillingness) to ameliorate the black population's condition ("Malcolm X Article Favors Goldwater," *New York Times*, September 8, 1964, p. 19).

[322] Curtis, *Islam in Black America*, p. 101.

[323] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, pp. 131-132.

[324] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 1671.

[325] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 1690. Malcolm X had already met in the United States Sudanese expatriates who influenced his ideas about Islam and race even before April 1964; Emily Jane O'Dell offers a detailed analysis of these relations in the article "X Marks the Spot: Mapping Malcolm X's Encounters with Sudan" (Emily Jane O'Dell, "X Marks the Spot: Mapping Malcolm X's Encounters with Sudan," *Journal of Africana Religions*, III, 1 [2015], pp. 96-115).

oppression, Malcolm X reported in his diary the impressions of an English man about the Ethiopians: "They are different from all other African because they had never been colonized. 'They do not have a chip on their shoulders.'"[326]

There are not many other interesting insights about these first stages of the African trip: according to his accounts, Malcolm X spent most of the time in Ethiopia doing interviews, planning the next stops of the itinerary, and having meetings during almost every meal. After a week, he flew to Kenya, where what struck him the most was the enviable wind of revolution sweeping the country:

> [Kenya is] a place which really knocked me out. If ever I saw any Africans who looked like they had the potential for explosion, it is our Kikuyu brothers in Kenya… They look like they can explode, more so than any place I went on the continent. You can just see, right in their faces, energy…[327]

This comment is particularly interesting given Malcolm X's fascination with Kenyan freedom fighters, the Mau Mau. Almost a year earlier, in the famous speech "Message to the Grass Roots" from November 10, 1963 (one of the lasts he gave as a member of the Nation), he was already talking about this group as an inspiring model for the African American population: accusing the peaceful methods of the domestic revolts and claiming that revolutions are necessarily bloody, hostile, and uncompromising, Malcolm X invited his audience to look at the revolutions occurring in Africa. In the case of Kenya (which would achieve independence the following month), he praised the rebel group by saying: "The Mau Mau, they were revolutionary, they believed in scorched earth, they knocked everything aside that got in their way, and their revolution also was based on land, a desire for land."[328]

This was not an isolated reference: in December 1964, when he was back in the United States, Malcolm X declared that the Mau Mau would be remembered "as the greatest African patriots and freedom fighters that [Africa] ever knew, and they [would] be given credit for

[326] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 1690.

[327] The Kikuyu are a Kenyan ethnic group that in the Sixties represented around one fifth of the African country's population (Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 99).

[328] In Malcolm X's understanding, a revolution based on land was particularly important because "land is the basis of freedom, justice, and equality" (Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, pp. 8-9).

bringing about the independence of many of the existing independent states on that continent."[329] He further developed the message by telling the audience:

> In my opinion, not only in Mississippi and Alabama, but right here in New York City, you and I can best learn how to get real freedom by studying how Kenyatta brought it to his people in Kenya, and how Odinga helped him, and the excellent job that was done by the Mau Mau freedom fighters. In fact, that is what we need in Mississippi. In Mississippi we need a Mau Mau. In Alabama we need a Mau Mau. In Georgia we need a Mau Mau. Right here in Harlem, in New York City, we need a Mau Mau.[330]

It was clear that Malcolm X and the Mau Mau shared the firm conviction that freedom had to be achieved by any means necessary, which is probably why the Kenyan group's anti-colonial struggle had inspired Malcolm X even before it succeeded in pushing the European colonists out of the African country. Still, this historical achievement probably pushed him to promote the Mau Mau more decisively in the African American community, also hoping that such example would help restore a positive and prideful image of Africa among the black American population.

With this regard, Malcolm X also discussed the subject of self-perception, as best exemplified by this passage of an interview with the journalist Pio Gama Pinto:

> As long as Africa was colonised, the coloniser projected the image of Africa and it was negative. And this made the people of African origin in the West not want to identify with Africa. And as the image of Africa was negative, the image of themselves was negative. But now [that] Africa is projecting a positive image, you find that the black people in the West are also projecting a positive image, they have more self-confidence and they are stepping up their drive in this struggle for freedom.[331]

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[329] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 106.

[330] Jomo Kenyatta was the first prime minister and president of Kenya and Oginga Odinga was his vice-president (Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 106).

[331] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 101.

This is just an instance in which he discussed race consciousness during his African trip, but in general Malcolm X did not get completely carried away by the intense lobbying in high-ranking political circles: in fact, he always knew that the success of his international campaign would have been of little use without a psychological reformation of the African American community.

The next stops of the African tour were Zanzibar on October 9 (a one-day trip that Malcolm X defined uneventful) and the near Tanzania on October 10, a country that similarly to Kenya had achieved independence from Britain in 1963.[332] Besides the record of a series of meetings and interviews, Malcolm X did not provide much information about the week he spent in this Eastern African country and accounts from other people do not help reconstruct any notable moment.

On the contrary, his return trip to Kenya from October 17 to 24 included a very meaningful episode, which involved what Malcolm X vaguely defined in the *Autobiography* as an "American white ambassador in one African country" that was considered "Africa's most respected American ambassador."[333] According to the American writer Les Payne, the episode took place in Kenya on October 21 and the American white ambassador was William Attwood, who at the time worked at the embassy in Nairobi.[334] Malcolm X's encounter with Attwood deserves particular attention because it offered him a key insight to reflect upon: during a long discussion, the ambassador admitted that while in Africa "he never thought in terms of race, that he dealt with human beings, never noticing their color differences," and "only when he returned to America would he become aware of color differences."[335] The lesson that Malcolm gathered from this confession was that the American political, economic, and social atmosphere was to be blamed for white people's racist tendencies: "We both agreed," he wrote in the *Autobiography*, "that American society makes it next to impossible for humans to meet in

[332] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 1759.

[333] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 370.

[334] However, there are some doubts about this identification: Malcolm X wrote in the *Autobiography* that he spent the entire afternoon discussing with an unnamed ambassador; however, in the diary entry on October 21, he outlined an extremely busy schedule, where there is no mention of this interaction (actually, it cannot be found in any other day either, as it was only mentioned in the *Autobiography*). Moreover, Attwood was extremely critical of Malcolm X during and after his stay in Kenya, so it would be surprising if he actually spent a whole afternoon conversating (and agreeing on racial issues) with him (Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 371; Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 1847; and L. Payne and T. Payne, *The Dead Are Arising*, p. 453).

[335] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 371.

America and not be conscious of their color differences," which meant that "the white man is not inherently evil, but America's racist society influences him to act evilly."[336]

Despite not referencing this important interaction, Attwood's reports of Malcolm X visits to Kenya constitutes a significant evidence of his great impact on the newly independent country's people: in the telegrams sent from the embassy in Nairobi, the American ambassador communicated that the Kenyans welcomed Malcolm X warmly, which was alarming since, Attwood forecasted, "his twisted account [of the] U.S. civil rights situation will no doubt be widely accepted among emotional and less sophisticated Kenyan leaders."[337] Later, in a telegram from early November (when Malcolm X had already left the country), Attwood confirmed his previous fear: "We disagree that Malcolm has had no real impact in Africa," he wrote to the Secretary of State and to other American ambassadors in Africa, "[h]e had considerable success in Kenya in publicizing his views and in getting ear of Kenyan leaders."[338]

In light of these accounts and the high-level meetings he took part in (not to mention that he was even invited to address the parliament, in an appearance that he described as "a tremendous success"),[339] Malcolm X's sojourn in Kenya ranks among the most noteworthy stops of the African tour. Next, he spent one week back in Ethiopia and in Guinea before travelling to Nigeria on October 31. Similarly for the previous two countries, there is not much information about the couple of days in which Malcolm X was there, but according to the American Embassy in Lagos his visit was quite unfruitful: based on the Nigerian press' limited coverage of his brief visit, a report from the embassy concluded that "his impact in Nigeria [was] considerably less than on previous visit."[340] On the same note, the subsequent sojourn in Ghana from November 2 to 5 was described by the African American expatriate Leslie Lacy as follows:

> His second coming, unlike his first [in May 1964], was quiet and uneventful. On his first coming he had received a hero's welcome, speeches all over the country, addresses to parliament, excellent press coverage; he had met the president. […]

[336] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 371.
[337] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 112.
[338] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 114.
[339] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 1867.
[340] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 121.

> On his second go-around, Malcolm was pensive, preoccupied, searching. He had new ideas and strategies. He was hurrying back to Harlem.[341]

It has been documented that Malcolm X's travel was constantly monitored by American officials, who furthermore often sought to sabotage his attempts to establish ties with African prominent leaders and to censor the local press advertising his public engagement.[342] However, it must also be acknowledged that, at least in certain occasions, Malcolm X was the one who tried to maintain a lower profile compared to the first international experience of 1964: for instance, Lacy recalled that his arrival in early November was a surprise for the community of African American expatriates (which had welcomed him triumphantly in May and had created an ad hoc committee to support him with planning), since he communicated his presence in Ghana after he had already landed at the airport of Accra.[343]

With regard to Malcolm X's state of mind in the last phase of the trip, many sources confirm the impression of Lacy, who noticed in him tiredness and fear, as well as "a strange feeling of finality":[344] the African American expatriate Maya Angelou recalled that Malcolm X did not necessarily look desperate the second time he was in Ghana, but she felt as "the hand of fate was on him."[345] John Lewis, a representative of the American Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee who toured Africa in late 1964, wrote on his memoir the details of his interaction with Malcolm X the time they met in Nairobi:

> Beyond his excitement and blossoming optimism, there was fear in the man, a nervousness that was written all over him.
> […] Something else he shared was a certainty that he was being watched, that he was being followed. When we went to his hotel room, he took a seat away from both the window and the door, explaining to us that he never sat with his back exposed. […] I would not say he was quite paranoid, but he had a great

[341] Leslie Alexander Lacy, "Malcolm X in Ghana," in Henrik, ed., *Malcolm X: The Man and His Times*, pp. 217-225, p. 225.

[342] The monitoring and the attempts to influence Malcolm X's second trip by American agencies are mentioned, among others, in DeCaro, *Malcolm and the Cross*, p. 204; Ahmed, "Islam and Black America," p. 476; and Lubin, "Between the Secular and the Sectarian," p. 93.

[343] Lacy, "Malcolm X in Ghana," pp. 218-219.

[344] Lacy, "Malcolm X in Ghana," p. 219.

[345] Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 219.

> sense of alarm, a great sense of anxiety. In a calm, measured way, he was convinced that somebody wanted him killed.[346]

Despite the previous testimonies refer to the late stages of the trip, Malcolm X's fatalism did not emerge just at the end of his sojourn abroad: in a letter from Cairo dated August 29, he confided to one of his American followers that his challenge to the "international system of racist exploitation" was putting him in serious danger: "[I]f I die or am killed before making it back to the States," he wrote, "you can rest assured that what I have already set in motion will never been stopped."[347]

The trip in Africa ended with some quite unremarkable visits to Liberia, Guinea, and Algeria, after which Malcolm X took a flight for Geneva, Switzerland, on November 15. Overall, it is widely held that his international lobbying campaign to take the black American case of human rights' violation to the United Nations was unsuccessful. Behind the negative state of mind previously discussed there were undoubtedly the exhaustion caused by the erratic pace of his tour, the anxiety generated by the awareness of being monitored in every move and, most importantly, the fear to be killed in any moment; but it is very likely that realizing that his project was not coming to fruition must have discouraged Malcolm X too. Goldman effectively illustrates this awareness:

> Malcolm eventually was forced to recognize [that there was] a disparity between the warmth with which Africa welcomed him and the yes-but caution with which it received his call to arms against America. In the end he discovered that it was bucking not only the vast distance between Harlem and Africa—a distance he blamed perhaps too easily on white American propaganda—but the great reach of U.S. foreign aid. Africa liked Malcolm X but could not afford him.[348]

It is difficult to disagree with this analysis, especially given that Malcolm X himself had been vocal about the main obstacle to face since the beginning of the trip, when at the OAU summit he warned the African delegates of the "deceitful, 'friendly' American dollarism."[349] He further

[346] John Lewis, *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1998, p. 288.
[347] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 132.
[348] Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 217.
[349] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 77.

developed this concept on January 7, 1965, in a round of questions and answers that followed his "Prospects for Freedom in 1965" speech at the Militant Labor Forum, when, talking about his travel, the Third World countries and the Cold War bipolar order taking shape in the Sixties, he affirmed:

> Everybody becomes a satellite nowadays. […] This is just my own opinion from observations that I have made traveling around the world and listening with big ears.
>
> It is easy to become a satellite today without even being aware of it. This country can seduce God. Yes, it has that seductive power—the power of dollarism. You can cuss out colonialism, imperialism and all other kinds of -isms, but it's hard for you to cuss that dollarism. When they drop those dollars on you, your soul goes.[350]

Even if it was not for "dollarism," the countries Malcolm toured from July to November might have had little sympathy or interest in the African American struggle because they were prioritizing internal problems (such as chronic underdevelopment and post-colonial state formation) over international concerns.[351] Furthermore, as the American scholar William W. Sales Jr. pointed out, human rights law was still at its infancy in the Sixties, the ratification of its founding documents (mainly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) was only partially completed at global level, and domestic courts remained the main venue where human rights' violations had to be addressed.[352] Then, in addition to the imperfect international legal framework, the United States held a position of primacy in the United Nations, meaning that it "possessed considerable power to block any embarrassing issues from being raised in that body."[353] Lastly, the non-aligned stance and the multi-ethnic composition of many African states (which implied the risk of domestic insurgencies, so that promoting foreign liberation movements would be at odd with the suppression of internal forces with similar aims) further devalued Malcolm X's call to join the black struggle.[354]

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[350] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 199.

[351] Sales, *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation*, p. 143.

[352] Sales, *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation*, p. 144.

[353] Sales, *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation*, p. 144.

[354] Sales, *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation*, p. 145.

Malcolm X's plan to escape "Uncle Sam's jurisdiction" and appeal to the international forum by moving the focus from civil to human rights to solve the endless systemic oppression of the black American people was brilliant, but as the previous attempts to internationalize this issue made by prominent past American figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois showed,[355] in the Sixties there were not the condition for a similar project to succeed yet, not even by resorting to the solidarity between the colored people of the world. Nonetheless, acknowledging the unsuccess of his United Nation plan does not make his second trip of 1964 to the Middle East and especially Africa a failure: as already reported in the previous pages of this chapter, the American officials were seriously concerned by Malcolm X's one-man mission and his constant surveillance throughout every phase of his trip speaks volume about how influential he was to their eyes, most notably at the international level. Furthermore, the politically aware African youth became increasingly captivated by Malcolm X: as Lewis recalled, young Africans "wanted to know all about Malcolm X. He became the measuring rod in every one of our encounters. […] Malcolm X was considered […] an extremist, a revolutionary," which "was why [he] struck such a chord with them."[356] It must be also acknowledged that Malcolm X's attempts to form a coalition for his project contributed to create at least a proposition of unity between Africans and black Americans, which was not enough to mobilize the African leaders against the United States but still helped develop some degree of solidarity and political connections between the two.[357]

With regard to religion, the months spent abroad were extremely meaningful: comparing the first and the second international experiences of 1964, Malcolm X passed from being just a disbeliever of Elijah Muhammad who was curious of orthodox Islam to a true Muslim recognized by the Middle Eastern Islamic community. As DeCaro observed, "Malcolm seems to have entered the last phase of religious development that may be referred to as 'religiously' Muslim. […] [T]he quiet triumph of his second tour abroad was that Malcolm now was developing his own particular way of being a Muslim."[358] Learning more about Islam

[355] In 1951, W.E.B. Du Bois collaborated with the American organization Civil Right Congress to submit a petition titled "We Charge Genocide" to the United Nations. His goal was to present the African American plight as an international issue. The resolution never reached the United Nations, but given Malcolm X's profound knowledge of Du Bois' works, it is easy to assume that such effort inspired his project to internationalize the black struggle in the mid-Sixties (Tyner, *The Geography of Malcolm X*, p. 135).

[356] Lewis, *Walking With the Wind*, p. 286.

[357] Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 219.

[358] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 235.

reaffirmed Malcolm X's perception of this religion as one capable of eliminating racism and creating racial harmony, but this required the Muslim community not to relegate it simply to the spiritual dimension: indeed, he believed that faith must be practiced in a holistic way that brings about political and social change. Malcolm X's "particular way of being a Muslim," then, was "a way that distinguished the practicing Muslim from those who reduced Islam to a religion of ritual and tradition."[359] Consequently, in the last months of his life he interpreted his new role of Muslim missionary in America as one intrinsically linked to the black struggle.

These changes were not revolutionary, so the claim that Malcolm X returned to the United States as a new man is once again incorrect: what the second travel of 1964 did, similarly to the first one, was broadening his scope, not changing it.

[359] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 237.

Chapter 4

THREE EUROPEAN INTERLUDES IN THE FINAL MONTHS (NOVEMBER 1964−FEBRUARY 1965)

Leaving Algeria on November 15, Malcolm X bid farewell to the African continent. This departure marked the end of a pivotal chapter of his life, but it did not bring closure to the entire international experience: indeed, over the course of the three months preceding his tragic death, Malcolm X travelled to Europe on three occasions, spending approximately two weeks in the Old Continent. Overall, these periods differed substantially from the earlier travels of 1964: other than the shorter duration of the trips and the more familiar Western society found in Europe, Malcolm X travelled to England and France upon the invitation of local educational institutions and cultural organizations to participate in debates and to present his ideas in public forums, while there were no arranged meetings with prominent political leaders; therefore, it is safe to state that the trips in Europe did not include eye-opening religious experiences and the pursue of projects involving politics at the international level. However, in the couple of weeks he spent in the continent, Malcolm X attempted to "build a diasporic coalition of black, Asian and Muslim support in Western capitals," in a similar fashion to what he had done in the Middle East and Africa.[360] Lastly, these periods stand out also because they have not been documented in the travel journal and the *Autobiography* (if not in passing), a complication that deprives this study of two fundamental sources preserving Malcolm X's thoughts.

Despite this context and the related limitations, it is still worth providing an overview of the final international experiences and in general of the last months of Malcolm X's life. To this end, the chapter examines the two most famous speeches pronounced during this time abroad (at Oxford Union on December 3, 1964, and at London School of Economics on February 11, 1965), plus a concise presentation of the brief European sojourn in November and of the remaining time Malcolm X spent in the United States.

[360] Saladin, *Malcolm X at Oxford Union*, p. 2.

First Visit (November 1964)

On his way back to the United States, Malcolm X flew to Europe at the end of his Middle Eastern and African tours. The first stop was Geneve, Switzerland, where, according to Marable, he sought "to make contact with the city's Islamic Center and to deepen his links to the Muslim Brotherhood."[361] Malcolm X encountered Dr. Said Ramadan, the director of the Islamic Center of Geneve and son-in-law of the Muslim Brotherhood's founder Hassan al Banna, but he documented in his diary that they only met the evening before his departure, without then reporting any impression about their discussion.[362] On the basis of this limited information, it is difficult to assess whether the interaction was actually productive.

On November 17, Malcolm X moved to Paris, where Alioune Diop, a Senegalese intellectual who founded the journal *Présence Africaine*, invited him to speak in a public lecture at the *Salle de la Mutualité* on November 23,[363] the day after a daily visit to London which apparently went under every reporter's radar since no information about it seems to be retrievable.[364] George Breitman reported in the book *By Any Means Necessary* the session of questions and answers that followed the speech in Paris, where Malcolm X presented his thoughts on a wide range of topics from which it is possible to grasp some recent changes in his ideology.

To start, Malcolm X criticized the nonviolent approach to liberation struggles worldwide: he argued that as the oppressed population were growing aware of the need for real action and of the inefficacy of nonviolence, controversial governments such as the South African and the American were recurring to "new modern tricks […] to try and keep them a little nonviolent a little while longer."[365] This way, black people were dissuaded from exercising their right to defend themselves with any means necessary. Proceeding with the speech, Malcolm X referenced imperialist powers handing out peace prizes to ensure the primacy of nonviolent

[361] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 385.

[362] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 2058.

[363] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 2058. Sherwood presented *Présence Africaine* as a French journal that "became highly influential in the Pan-Africanist movement, the decolonization struggle in the French colonies, and the birth of the *Négritude* philosophy"; in light of this description, and thus the affinity with his interests, it is no surprise that Malcolm X accepted to participate to the event (Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 135).

[364] Apparently, the only British source to record Malcolm X's visit was the *Sunday Telegraph*, which published a photo of him addressing the Federation of Mohammedan Students' Societies (Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 140).

[365] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 136.

approaches, a comment that was not casual: indeed, on October 14, 1964, Martin Luther King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize "for his non-violent struggle for civil rights for the Afro-American population."[366] In closing the answer, however, Malcolm X warned that a growing black consciousness was changing the situation or, in the words he pronounced, "everybody does not always accept those prizes."[367]

Next, Malcolm X denied being the leader of any group: as he humbly explained, "I am one of the [twenty-two] million Afro-Americans, all of whom have suffered the same things. And I probably cry out a little louder against the suffering than most others and therefore, perhaps, I am better known."[368] Linked to this point, he also denied having a defined program or a solution to the African Americans' systemic oppression, but on the other hand what he did have was the will to resort to any means necessary to put an end to this situation.

In extending the accusation beyond white individuals to the American (or even the whole Western) system, Malcolm X argued that the challenge to produce a change in black people's lives laid in the nature of the latter, which "was produced from the enslavement of the black man [and] is capable only of reproducing that out of which itself was produced."[369] Malcolm X held that without a revolution this cycle of oppression could not be broken, while separation or integration were not reasonable solutions because they implied the acceptance, not challenge, of the American system's injustices.[370]

On a lighter note, one of the most widely reported answers from this meeting was that concerning interracial relationships: while in the previous years he strongly opposed such possibility, now Malcolm X declared tenderly: "How can anyone be against love? Whoever a person wants to love that is their business—like their religion."[371] Accordingly, he claimed that religious choices were personal matters, but to this he also added his criticism toward Christianity, which he said "was used in America on us, on our people, not to take us to Heaven but to make us good slaves, primarily—by robbing us of our right to defend ourselves in the

[366] https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/facts/ (accessed September 13, 2021).
[367] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 136.
[368] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 138.
[369] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 138.
[370] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, pp. 138-139.
[371] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 140.

name of Jesus."[372] In this sense, Malcolm X interpreted what in the past he had defined "the white's religion" as a tool for perpetuating the American system of oppression.

Lastly, in a consideration consistent with his pre-travel ideas, Malcolm X reaffirmed his conviction that a "spiritual 'back-to-Africa'" movement would have been more appropriate than a physical migration: in fact, he claimed that the former would have the advantage of allowing black Americans to establish ties with Africa that could benefit the domestic struggle and help "influence the government's policies and keep them from supporting men like Tshombe."[373] Malcolm X admitted that a physical return to Africa was not a wrong idea, but already in May he had been realist about this possibility: "Moving my family out of America," he wrote during his first African sojourn, "may be good for me personally but bad for me politically."[374] In sum, Malcolm X believed that the historical link between Africans and African Americans made the success of their struggles interdependent: "To the same degree Africa is independent and respected," he said, "we [black Americans] are independent and respected, but to the degree we are disrespected the Africans are also disrespected. Our origin is the same and our destiny is the same, whether we like it or not."[375]

The French meeting represents an insightful source that reveals to what degree Malcolm X's ideas had evolved over the previous months spent in foreign countries. An overview of the topics discussed (which included American domestic politics and foreign policy, nonviolence, religion, and many others) demonstrates that Malcolm X's approach remained for the most part inflammatory and his overall stance was still that of a revolutionary. One can spot sporadic

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[372] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 137.

[373] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 142. Moise Tshombe was an African politician who led the secession of Katanga (a mineral-rich region in the south-east of Congo) in 1960 and four years later became Prime Minister of the Congo Republic. In an earlier interview, Malcolm X accused him of being "a tool of the neo-colonialist, who is recognized by the entire world as the cold-blooded murderer of Patrice Lumumba," the first Prime Minister of the Congo Republic who was assassinated in January 1961. In general, Tshombe and the Congo crisis was one of Malcolm X's most recurrent analogies during his public engagements between late 1964 and early 1965, particularly because the American President Johnson and other Western allies maintained ties with Tshombe during the Congolese civil war of the early Sixties. References to Tshombe, however, did not result from an ideological evolution occurred during the 1964 travels: as far back as February 1961, Malcolm X had defended himself from a New York Police Department's unfounded accusation of being responsible for a local demonstration organized by a nationalist group by naming the Congolese leader: "I refuse to condemn the demonstrations," he affirmed, "because I am not Moise Tshombe, and will not permit no one to use me against the nationalists" (Ira Dworkin, "The Chickens Coming Home to Roost Malcolm X, the Congo, and Modern Black Nationalism," in *Congo Love Song: African American Culture and the Crisis of the Colonial State*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 2017, pp. 257-287, p. 258; Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, locations 2610-2620; Saladin, *Malcolm X at Oxford Union*, p. 46; and Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, pp. 78-79).

[374] Herb and Ilyasah, *The Diary of Malcolm X*, location 734.

[375] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 144.

changes of opinion (for instance, the answer related to interracial relationships), but it would be exaggerated to claim that such variations were affecting the core principles of his ideology as exposed earlier in the year.

After this brief European tour, Malcolm X returned to the United States on November 24, where he only spent one week before returning to London for another short trip he had arranged while he was still in Africa.[376] Nonetheless, these days in late November were far from a break: for starters, Malcolm X came home to the news that in September the Civil Court of New York had ruled the case involving the ownership of his house in favor of the Nation, so he was supposed to leave within January.[377] Then, he was faced with the disorganization of the Muslim Mosque Inc. and the OAAU, which were too dependent on his leadership not to suffer from the prolonged absence of the previous months.[378] Lastly, the threats coming from the Nation became increasingly intimidating: to quote one, on December 4 the Nation's newspaper *Muhammad Speaks* reported the following message: "The die is set, and Malcolm shall not escape, especially after such evil, foolish talk. […] Such a man as Malcolm is worthy of death."[379]

In spite of this hostile and stressful situation, Malcolm X delivered multiple speeches between November 24 and 30, among which none is more important than the OAAU Homecoming Rally on November 29. The salient points of the speech covered mostly his recent international experience: Malcolm X explained that it helped present his two organization to the Muslim world and Africa (respectively for the religious and political activities) and that he clearly perceived the American officials' attempts to "make it impossible for any American Negro to be included in any way in any conference […] dealing with international affairs."[380] Furthermore, the same American officials strove to convince the African population of the black Americans refusal to identify with their struggle and to inform local populations that the passage of the Civil Rights Act "created a paradise in the United States for the [twenty-two] million Negroes."[381] Malcolm X went as far as affirming that the vicious job made by the United States

[376] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 390.
[377] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 228.
[378] L. Payne and T. Payne, *The Dead Are Arising*, p. 455.
[379] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 398.
[380] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 161.
[381] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 161.

Information Service in foreign countries made the "propaganda machine that Goebbels had, under Hitler, look like child's play."[382]

The following segment of the speech was an innovative declaration that shed light on Malcolm X's interpretation of Islam after the recent travel to the Middle East:

> I want to say this too, in passing, for the benefit of our Muslim brothers and sisters […] This is not a religious meeting. When I come to a meeting sponsored by the OAAU, […] I put my religion in this pocket right here, and keep it here. And when I talk like this, it does not mean I am less religious, it means I am more religious.
>
> I believe in a religion that believes in freedom. Any time I have to accept a religion that will not let me fight a battle for my people, I say to hell with that religion. That is why I am a Muslim, because it is a religion that teaches you an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It teaches you to respect everybody, and treat everybody right. But it also teaches you if someone steps on your toe, chop off their foot. And I carry my religious axe with me all the time.[383]

The allusion to a religious axe and the reference to the Biblical verse "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" effectively symbolize Malcolm X's rejection of nonviolent methods and his functional understanding of religions, but at the same time they also represent an extreme comment that could have easily discouraged the other African American leaders from collaborating with him for the sake of the black struggle.

In general, a comparison with the declarations made between the first and second trips seems to suggest that the paramount focus of Malcolm X progressively moved from a call for unity between African Americans to one between the oppressed populations worldwide. Given that the central theme remained unity, this is not to say that any of these two objectives were ever put aside in pursuing the other: rather, this observation points to the fact that the primary emphasis appears to have shifted according to a prioritization of the international dimension of the black struggle.

[382] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 161.

[383] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 162.

Toward the end of the OAAU Homecoming Rally, Malcolm X repeated the concept he had stressed at the OAU summit in July: African American problems were African problems and vice versa, so the only way to solve them, in his opinion, was to work together; this, in turn, required direct contact because it was imperative to avoid having "any handkerchief-head set up by the State Department as a spokesman" in foreign countries.[384] Next, he proposed the formation of a group of African American volunteers to fight against imperialist forces in foreign lands, a provocation that should be interpreted as a denounce of the hypocritical role assumed by Western colonialists and neo-colonialists in countries such as Congo rather than an actual call to war. In conclusion, Malcolm X reaffirmed his rejection of any form of racism (he deemed necessary to specify that his suspicion and caution he still had toward a lot of "them" derived from experience and not preconception) and unjustified violence: the message to convey was that black Americans were now willing to react to mistreatments by any means necessary.[385]

The OAAU Homecoming Rally represented a great opportunity for Malcolm X to offer his followers the vision he had developed during his long absence. Like the French speech of the previous week, it is difficult to spot a clear divergence from the principles that had guided his project in the earlier months of 1964: what emerges here is mostly a more international, revolutionary and, if possible, militant approach aiming at ending black Americans' systemic oppression. It is also worth noticing that Malcolm X did not discuss at length his United Nation plan, a choice behind which there might be his discouragement for its underwhelming progresses.

Second Visit (December 1964)

As anticipated before, Malcolm X departed soon for a second visit to England. On December 3, he participated to a debate at the Oxford Union Society, where, in the American scholar Saladin Ambar's opinion, he delivered a speech that represents "the more comprehensive, best articulated, and clearest sense of his personal and political vision on the future of race relations."[386] Malcolm X argued for the motion, which was a statement made by Goldwater at the acceptance speech during the Republican National Convention in July 1964: "Extremism

[384] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 168.
[385] Breitman, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 174.
[386] Saladin, *Malcolm X at Oxford Union*, p. 33.

in the defense of liberty is no vice. Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." There is no doubt that the speech delivered at Oxford demands to be explored in its entirety to fully appreciate its importance, but because it includes many reflections that have already been discussed through other speeches pronounced in the same period, the analysis of its content will be limited to the most significant passages.

At the beginning of the speech, after having rejected the previous speaker's accusation of being a supporter of racial separatism, Malcolm X introduced immediately the two key themes of the address: subjectivity and hypocrisies, of which the Western countries in particular were guilty. He started by suggesting that what his Islamic faith meant to him (that is, an indiscriminate openness to brotherhood, which however he expected to be reciprocated) was probably going to be distorted by the press, since "one of the tricks of the West is to use or create images."[387] This subterfuge, he explained, targeted people with critical stances against Western governance and aimed at discrediting them in the eyes of the public (by no coincidence, this sounds like a description of Malcolm X's experience).

The passage that followed this denunciation reveals not only Malcolm X's position with regard to the debate's motion but, more in general, his ideology:

> I think the only way one can really determine whether or not extremism in defense of liberty is justified, is not to approach it as an American or a European or an African or an Asian, but as a human being. If […] we look upon ourselves as human beings, I doubt that anyone will deny that extremism in defense of liberty, the liberty of any human being, is no vice. Anytime anyone is enslaved or in any way deprived of his liberty, that person […] is justified to resort to whatever methods necessary to bring about his liberty again.[388]

By choosing not to reference "the plight of twenty-two million African Americans" as the subject (the standard formula he had been using in most speeches, especially with foreign audiences), Malcolm X was adopting a more universal approach that made use of both his Islamic identity and his militant political stance to internationalize the black struggle into a

[387] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 37. Being in England, it is interesting to notice the original use of the subject "West" to refer to an enlarged, internationalized dimension of what Malcolm X had usually defined as the American system or government.

[388] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, pp. 37-38.

more inclusive human struggle, without explicit racial connotations. This is not a claim that Malcolm X was moving beyond an analysis involving race as a determining factor (as it will be clearer in the final part of the speech): instead, his invite was to avoid approaching extremism in relative and subjective terms.

The example he employed to convey this message was, not surprisingly, the Congo crisis: Malcolm X argued that Western countries' criminal actions in the African country were labelled as humanitarian and not extremist by the biased press. This way, their controversial choices in foreign policy (which especially in the American case were guided by Cold War's tactics) were welcomed by the general public with praise instead of disapproval.[389] The analysis of the problem made by Malcolm X is interesting because it clearly shows how, as Ambar pointed out, "[i]n this new phase of [his] political understanding, unrestrained power is the devil within humanity, not the blood that courses through the veins of whites."[390] As seen before, this is not a ground-breaking development that debuted in Oxford, but rather another proof that over the previous months Malcolm X had been revaluating what for many years he had believed were the forces opposing racial justice.

In any case (and in no contradiction with the previous reflections), the adjective "white" continued to be a part of Malcolm X rhetoric: in rejecting the extremism of the foreign and foreign-sponsored forces killing innocent Congolese people while supporting extremism in defense of liberty (meaning the one exercised by the victims), he revealed the hypocrisies of the white public who attaches "more importance to a white hostage and a white death than [it does] the death of a human being despite the color of his skin."[391] He continued:

> And when you [white people] begin to think in terms of death being death, no matter what type of human being it is, then we will all probably be able to sit down as human beings and get rid of this extremism and moderation. But as long as the situation exists as it is, we are going to need some extremism, and I think some of you will need some moderation too.[392]

[389] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, pp. 38-39.
[390] Saladin, *Malcolm X at Oxford Union*, p. 49.
[391] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 42.
[392] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 42.

This blunt comment should be read as an exhortation to white people more than an accusation against them. To prove this claim, a following segment of Malcolm X's speech shows his improved trust in racial solidarity: the moment black people realize that it is in their right to employ any means necessary to protect their freedom, he believed, "many whites will have more respect for them [and] there will be more whites on their side then are now on their side with this little whisy-washy 'love-the-enemy' approach that they have been using up to now. And if I am wrong," Malcolm X concluded amidst the audience's laughter and applauses, "then you are racialists."[393]

It is impossible to say whether being in front of a non-American white audience influenced Malcolm X's approach to whiteness during this speech.[394] If not, the growing confidence in white people's support to the black struggle represents a stark departure from the conviction he expressed after the first travel of 1964 that "in America, the seeds of racism are so deeply rooted in the white people collectively [that they became part of] the national white subconsciousness."[395] Meanwhile, Malcolm X left no doubt about his thoughts on the American system, which are consistent with past statements:

> I live in a society whose [social, political, and economic] system is based upon the castration of the Black man. A society which, in 1964, has more subtle, deceptive, deceitful methods to make the rest of the world think it is cleaning up its house, while at the same time the same things are happening to us in 1964 that happened in 1954, 1924, and in 1984.
> […] [O]ur lives are not worth two cents […] because we have the wrong skin color.[396]

[393] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 45.

[394] Reflecting on his different experiences with European and American reporters when he was minister of the Nation, Malcolm X declared in the *Autobiography* that "the Europeans never pressed the 'hate' question. Only the American white man was so plagued and obsessed with being 'hated.' He was so guilty, it was clear to me, of hating Negros" (Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 240). Years later, in an interview with Robert Nunn on June 2, 1964, Malcolm X affirmed that Western European whites "have racist attitudes, but their racist attitude is never displayed to the degree that the America's attitude of racism is displayed" (Malcolm X, "Interview with Malcolm X, June 2, 1964"). Not praises but neither definitive condemnations, these comments are not sufficient to determine Malcolm X's possibly different attitude toward the primarily white audience at Oxford Union.

[395] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, pp. 362-363.

[396] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 46.

In closing the speech, Malcolm X restated his openness to collaborate with everyone, regardless of color, who is determined to "change this miserable condition that exists on this Earth."[397]

The address Malcolm X gave at Oxford Union is an inestimable testimony of his ideas about an incredibly wide range of topics, especially pertaining to the international context. After an in-depth study of the previous months of his life, however, it would not be correct to define it a revolutionary speech since many of its points had already been introduced in previous public engagements. Still, it is difficult to find a more developed, comprehensive, and coherent argumentation of Malcolm X's thought following his last tour of Africa and the Middle East than the one he articulated in Oxford.

Malcolm X left Oxford on December 3 for a four-day tour that brought him to Manchester, Sheffield, and London. The accounts of Oxford's students, with whom Malcolm X spent much of his time in the English city, reveal not only their great enthusiasm for the speech, but also his awareness that he did not have much longer to live: Tariq Ali, an Oxford student in the Sixties, recalled that to his invite to meet again in the future, Malcolm X replied: "I do not think so. By this time next year I will be dead";[398] the Nation, he confided, had already ordered his assassination at that time.[399] Moreover, the FBI kept monitoring his activities, both abroad and in the United States: in a file from December 8, the FBI director John Edgar Hoover wrote that with his return from Africa, "the possibility exists that additional coverage of his activities is desirable particularly since he intends to have the Negro question brought before the United Nations."[400]

During the two months that separated his return in America (on December 6) and the last international travel, Malcolm X held weekly OAAU rallies in addition to numerous interviews and public engagements. The arrangements for the next departure were made in December, when Malcolm X accepted the invitation of the Committee of African Organisations' president Kojo Amoo-Gottfried to participate in a rally in London in early February.[401]

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[397] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 50.

[398] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 157.

[399] Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties*, Collins, London 1987, p. 43.

[400] Ahmed, "Islam and Black America," p. 476.

[401] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 184.

Third Visit (February 1965)

The last international travel of Malcolm X started in London on February 6, where he was scheduled to address the first congress of the Committee of African Organisations. After three days in the English capital, he was supposed to continue the European tour in Paris, but as soon as he landed in France the local authorities detained him at the airport and, without offering any explanation, forced him back to London. According to the information gathered by the American Embassy in Paris, the "French Minister of Interior barred his entry because it felt his presence […] may cause demonstrations and other trouble."[402] Malcolm X channeled his confusion and disappointment through another denunciation of the American foreign policy: commenting the fact that he was unable to contact the embassy, in an interview of the same day (February 9) he stressed how ironical was that "the American Embassy was willing to send troops [in Congo and] South Vietnam and they can do whatever they want to do all over the world, but […] at the same time they cannot do something about the mishandling of a Black man."[403]

Back in England, Malcolm X's four-day sojourn had as its highlight the speech at the London School of Economics on February 11, an institution that in the Sixties welcomed many foreign students and, according to Ambar, was "a more radical center of student dissent than the more cloistered Oxford."[404] The opening remarks of the speech, similarly to the Oxford speech, served Malcolm X to present his Muslim faith, which, he clarified, did not blind him in front of the racial injustices occurring in the United States: "It is only being a Muslim which keeps me from seeing people by the color of their skin. This religion teaches brotherhood, but I have to be realist—I live in America, a society which does not believe in brotherhood in any sense of the term. […] It is a racist society ruled by segregationists."[405]

Malcolm X proceeded by addressing the subject of violence, repeating his belief that black people should be able to defend themselves by any means necessary (which does not necessarily imply the use of violence, but neither does it discourage it), and the skillful but deceitful use of the press by the racist liberals, who pushed the white public to accept that "the dark skinned

[402] Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad*, p. 187.

[403] Malcolm X, "Telephone Conversation With Malcolm X," *Présence Africaine*, Second trimester, 62 (1967), pp. 63-69, p. 64.

[404] Saladin Ambar, "The Din of Malcolm: Projections of Islam in France and the United Kingdom, 1964-1965," *Journal of Africana Religions*, III, 1 (2015), pp. 18-30, p. 26.

[405] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 53.

community consists largely of criminals or people who are dirty," in a way that "makes it possible for the power structure to set up a police-state system."[406] In what appears to be a leitmotif of the last speeches, it can be noticed the reference to whiteness in discussing the perpetrators of the African Americans' suffering, but unlike past comments Malcolm X's analysis moved the source of racism from people (the notorious "white devils") to power structures, targeting especially the press. After the usual reference to Congo to prove the hypocrisies of the American foreign interventions, Malcolm X provided his understanding of the tactic used to project a negative image of black people:

> So what the press does with its skillful ability to create this imaginary, it uses its pages to whip up this hysteria in the white public. And as soon as the hysteria of the white public reaches the proper degree, they will begin to work on the sympathy of the white public. And once the sympathy reaches the proper degree, then they put forth their program, knowing that they are going to get the support of the gullible white public in whatever they do. And what they are going to do is criminal.[407]

The denigration and the unfounded accusations against black people had also harmful psychological consequences. Malcolm X argued that the Western colonial powers had been distorting the image of Africa in such a negative manner that people of African heritage around the world started hating it. In turn, since "you cannot hate the roots of the tree without hating the tree," Malcolm X concluded that black people began hating themselves in a subconscious way: "By making our people in the Western Hemisphere hate Africa," he said in London, "we ended up hating ourselves. We hated our characteristics. We hated our African identities. […] This was a reaction, but we did not realize it was a reaction."[408] The ultimate goal, then, had to do with the preservation of an oppressive, racist system: blackness, in Malcolm X's analogy, became a chain, a prison, something that held back black people for ages.[409]

In a speech mostly focused on the international dimension, Malcolm X chose to cite the Nation of Islam, which was quite a rare topic in his foreign public addresses. Equally surprising,

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[406] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 54.
[407] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 58.
[408] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, pp. 62-63.
[409] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 63.

the comment he made about Elijah Muhammad's organization did not evaluate negatively its role in the progression of the black struggle. Discussing the effects of the African anti-colonial movements on the American civil rights struggle, he claimed that there had been a chain effect in the past years:

> It is the African revolution that produced the Black Muslim movement. It was the Black Muslim movement that pushed the Civil Rights Movement. And it was the Civil Rights Movement that pushed the liberals out into the open, where today they are exposed as people who have no more concern for the rights of dark-skinned humanity than they do for any other form of humanity.[410]

In particular, it was the African militancy to inspire the Black Muslims: developing this thought in Detroit three days after the speech at the London School of Economics, Malcolm X affirmed that the Nation did little other than push for moral reformation, but at the same time "it talked such a strong talk that it put the other Negro organizations on the spot" and "frightened the white man so hard that he began to say, 'Thank God for old Uncle Roy, and Uncle Whitney and Uncle A. Philip.'"[411]

Malcolm X closed the speech with a message of hope: the African revolution, he claimed, was turning the Western black population into a militant and confident force with a positive self-perception, in a way that allowed it to understand its struggle as an international problem of humanity, not just a domestic issue concerning civil rights.[412] This approach to the black struggle was possible because "the Black man in the Western Hemisphere […] has a new sense of identity; he has a new sense of dignity; he has a new sense of urgency. And above all else, he sees now that he has allies."[413]

Malcolm X had been encouraging this rehabilitation of self-respect and confidence for years, so the fact that he closed his last famous speech abroad announcing that a change was

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[410] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 70.

[411] Malcolm X adapted the derogatory epithet Uncle Tom to the names of famous Civil Rights Movement's leaders: Roy Wilkins, the executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; Whitney M. Young Jr., head of the National Urban League; and A. Philip Randolph, director of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom of August 28, 1963. He explained this choice in the next passage of the Detroit speech: "[I]f you use the word 'Uncle Tom' nowadays, I hear they can sue you for libel, you know. So I do not call any of them Uncle Tom anymore. I call them Uncle Roy" (Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 171).

[412] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 72.

[413] Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 73.

actually taking place in black Americans' psyche is extremely symbolic. He flew back to the United States on February 13 after a tour of Smethwick (an English city that became "nearly synonymous with the issue of race" due to the systemic housing discrimination practiced against immigrants in the mid-Sixties) and Birmingham in the two days that followed the speech in London.[414]

Considering some of the comments reported in the previous pages, Malcolm X was aware that back in America his life would be in constant danger, but an event on the day he returned home in New York made him realize that death was near.

[414] Saladin, *Malcolm X at Oxford Union*, p. 51.

CONCLUSION

The night between February 13 and 14, 1965, the home of Malcolm X in Queens was firebombed by a non-identified group of men (all the evidence, however, points to the Black Muslims). Even though he managed to escape the flames, saving his pregnant wife and their four children, this attack represented just the prelude to the tragedy that was to come the following week. The reflections on death reported in the final pages of the *Autobiography* prove that Malcolm X had already accepted his fate at this point:

> I am only facing the facts when I know that any moment of any day, or any night, could bring me death. This is particularly true since the last trip that I made abroad. I have seen the nature of things that are happening, and I have heard things from sources which are reliable.
>
> To speculate about dying does not disturb me as it might some people. I never have felt that I would live to become an old man. Even before I was a Muslim—when I was a hustler in the ghetto jungle, and then a criminal in prison, it always stayed on my mind that I would die a violent death. In fact, it runs in my family. My father and most of his brothers died by violence—my father because of what he believed in. To come right down to it. If I take the kind of things in which I believe, then add to that the kind of temperament that I have, plus the one hundred percent dedication I have to whatever I believe in—these are ingredients which make it just about impossible for me to die of old age.[415]

A stoic Malcolm X continued his public engagements up to his last day, refusing to strengthen the security measures at the events in which he participated despite his awareness that a fatal attack was about to come. On February 21, moments after he entered the Audubon Ballroom's stage, he was shot dead by a group of hitmen hidden among the audience.[416]

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[415] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 378.

[416] The assassination has remained a controversial topic since 1965: three Black Muslims (Thomas Hagan, Norman Butler and Thomas Johnson) were convicted of the murder, but historians have not ruled out the involvement

Quite prophetically, Malcolm X foresaw that after his passing the "white press" would make him a symbol of hate:[417] on February 22, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article titled "Hatred for Whites Obsessed Malcolm X,"[418] while the *New York Times* wrote he was a "twisted man, turning many true gifts to evil purpose" and that the "world he saw through those horn-rimmed glasses of his was distorted and dark. But he made it darker still with his exaltation of fanaticism."[419] Two weeks later, *Time* magazine described Malcolm X as "an unashamed demagogue" whose "gospel was hatred [and] creed was violence."[420] The opposite foreign reactions to his death further proved Malcolm X's prophecy: on February 26, the *New York Times* reported that "African and Asian countries interpreted the murder of Malcolm X as the martyrdom of a great integrationist," to which the journalist could not help but arrogantly comment that this was "because they did not know what he stood for."[421]

In the days that followed the death of Malcolm X, many American newspapers attempted to synthetize in a few lines who he was and what had been his contribution to the black struggle. The result was often a mixture of the beliefs he held as a member of the Nation and those he developed after leaving the Black Muslims. Other journalists who avoided this pitfall (together with many other historians who tried to explain Malcolm X in the following decades) still failed to appreciate the changes in the ideology of Malcolm X over the last year of his life, usually because they preferred to sensationalize isolated statements or experiences in a way that contributed to inappropriately establishing him as an historical figure renowned for the hatred toward white people and the incitement to violence.

The last year is the most challenging phase of Malcolm X's life to study because it involved multiple international and heterogeneous experiences of a man that, for the first time in twelve years, was free to develop independently and critically his ideas. Therefore, it is not surprising to find in the literature many exaggerated and misleading comments according to which the

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of forces outside the Nation: many have been suggesting that the American government agencies played a role in the assassination, but there is no consensus on whether it was an active role or they were simply aware of the Nation's plan. Malcolm X too was not sure about who would be the one to strike him: other than Black Muslims, he believed he could have died at the hands of white racists or even "someone brainwashed Negro acting on his own idea that […] he would be helping out the white man" (Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 381).

[417] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 381.

[418] "Hatred for Whites Obsessed Malcolm X," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1965, p.11.

[419] "Malcolm X," *New York Times*, February 22, 1965, p. 20.

[420] "Races: Death and Transfiguration," *Time*, March 5, 1965.

[421] E. W. Kenworthy, "Malcolm Called a Martyr Abroad," *New York Times*, February 26, 1965, p. 15.

extensive travels of this period turned Malcolm X into a different person compared to the one who left the United States for Mecca in April 1964. On the other hand, in light of all the evidence discussed so far, it would be incorrect to argue that travels did not have any transformative effect on his ideology. Therefore, the main question is: to what degree was Malcolm X actually influenced by the tours in the Middle East, Africa and Europe between April 1964 and February 1965?

An exhaustive answer to this question requires a distinction between the beliefs Malcolm X maintained before his international experiences and those that emerged during the time spent abroad or between the travels. To start, he did not teach African Americans to think internationally and identify with the oppressed populations worldwide only after his foreign sojourns: the *Los Angeles Herald-Dispatch* of April 23, 1959 (so even prior to the mysterious trip of July 1959) published an article titled "Malcolm X Calls for Bandung Conference of Negro Leaders," which reported the substance of the speech Malcolm X pronounced in Harlem a day earlier:

> He pointed out that if the people in Africa are getting their freedom, then [twenty] million blacks here in America, instead of shouting hallelujah over what is happening [nine thousand] miles from America, should study the methods used by our darker brothers in Africa and Asia to get their freedom.[422]

Four years later, the concept did not change: in the "Message to the Grass Roots" speech of November 10, 1963, Malcolm X still affirmed that "once you study what happened at the Bandung conference, and the results of the Bandung conference, it actually serves as a model for the same procedure [to] use to get [African Americans'] problems solved."[423]

Also considering his early contacts with foreign delegates and leaders in the United States,[424] it seems evident that Malcolm X had already an international perspective and inspired his followers to adopt a similar vision for years before the split with the Nation and the

[422] Clayborne, *Malcolm X: The FBI File*, p. 143.

[423] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 5.

[424] Turner dated these initial contacts as far back as in the late Fifties. Moreover, he provided some identifications by reporting that the "association and/or friendships with Ahmad Sukarno of Indonesia, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Fidel Castro of Cuba, Gamel Abd al-Nasser and Mahmoud Yousse Shawarbi of Egypt, Patrice Lumumba of the Belgian Congo, and Ben Nella and Mahmoud Boutiba of Algeria gradually exposed him to radical Third World political ideas in the [Sixties]" (Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, p. 204).

following trips. What travel contributed to change was the identification of the oppressor: remaining on the "Message to the Grass Roots" speech, Malcolm X argued that when the "dark nations from Africa and Asia" gathered in Bandung in 1955, they realized that their common enemies were the "blond, blue-eyed and [white-skinned]" Europeans; likewise, all black Americans were oppressed by people with "blue eyes and blond hair and pale skin."[425] On February 15, 1965, following his last trip to England, Malcolm X expressed a more articulated and informed reflection about who should be identified as the enemy:

> [W]hat is [the worldwide revolution] against? The power structure. The American power structure? No. The French power structure? No. The English power structure? No. Then what power structure? An international Western power structure. An international power structure consisting of American interests, French interests, English interests, Belgian interests, European interests. These countries that formerly colonized the dark man formed into a giant international combine. A structure, a house that has ruled the world up until now.[426]

The geopolitical unbalance envisaged by Malcolm X still included Americans and Western Europeans ruling over the African American population and the Third World, but here there was no reference to a devilish white man with blond hair and blue eyes: the racist, exploitative, and oppressive enemy had become the international Western power structure. Three days before his assassination, he clarified even further that the problem was not all about race: "It is incorrect to classify the revolt of the Negro as simply a racial conflict of black against white, or as a purely American problem. Rather, we are today seeing a global rebellion of the oppressed against the oppressor, the exploited against the exploiter."[427]

This new interpretation had much to do with the African tours, when Malcolm X talked at length with political leaders, but also with students and other ordinary people, and thus learned onsite the effects of anti-colonial struggles and the efforts by the United States' propaganda machine to influence local populations according to the American Cold War strategies. The

[425] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 6.
[426] Bruce Perry, ed., *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1989.
[427] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, p. 217.

fundamental contribution to the change of perspective, however, probably resulted more from the religious side of the international experience: while leading to the official separation with the Nation, Malcolm X conveyed highly critical but sometimes contradictory messages about white people;[428] then, after his sojourns in the Middle East, he began consistently teaching his followers not to judge people on the basis of their color.[429] This was a principle he held until his death, even though it did not imply a reconsideration of the racist American structure or a post-racial vision: in fact, in mid-February 1965 Malcolm X explained clearly that a Muslim should condemn people only according to their deeds, therefore "we are not against people because you are white. But we are against those who practice racism. We are against those who drop bombs on people because their color happens to be of a different shade of yours."[430] Furthermore, Malcolm X clarified at the OAAU Homecoming Rally on November 29, 1964, that: "When I say white man, I am not saying all of you, because some of you might be all right. And whichever one of you acts all right with me, you are all right with me."[431]

The conversion to orthodox Islam, started in April 1964 and perfectioned in the second half of the year, marked Malcolm X's definitive renounce to the racist doctrine of the Nation: in short, he abandoned an understanding of race as a biological trait to embrace one in which it was a sociological reality.[432] Concerning this subject, travel (and above all the pilgrimage to Mecca) had a tremendous impact on the ideological growth despite the fact that, as discussed in the second chapter, Malcolm X had likely sensationalized his accounts about the initial phase of the first trip of 1964.

In general, Malcolm X's changing attitude toward whites as a result of travels has been subject to much debate over the last decades, partially because of the way he accentuated it in his writings and partially because he kept referring to whites in antagonistic terms after the epiphany in Mecca (even though, as the American scholar Rufus Burrow Jr. observed, "it came

[428] For instance, examining two declarations of May 1963, Malcolm X made apparently incompatible comments: one time, in an interview with Alex Haley, he explained that "[w]e Muslims believe that the white race, which is guilty of having oppressed and exploited and enslaved our people here in America, should and will be the victims of God's divine wrath"; the same month but on another occasion, he said in a way that resembles his later convictions: "When you are a Muslim, you do not look at the color of a man's skin [but] you look at the man and judge him according to his conscious behaviour" (Fisher, *Alex Haley: The Playboy Interviews*, p. 27; and DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 163).

[429] DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, p. 232.

[430] Perry, *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches*, p. 14.

[431] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, p. 389.

[432] Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning to Think for Ourselves: Malcolm X's Black Nationalism Reconsidered," in Wood, *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*, pp. 59-85, p. 61.

increasingly to be little more than a rhetorical device to shock what moral sensitivities the white man may have possessed").[433] Throughout the years, there have been original attempts to settle this debate,[434] but the underwhelming truth might be that Malcolm X himself would not be sure how to properly elucidate his ever-changing thought: as he admitted to Haley in a letter from late 1964, "[w]ith the fast pace of newly developing incidents today, it is easy for something that is done or said tomorrow to be outdated even by sunset on the same day."[435] So, as with any other historical figure, Malcolm X must be accepted also with his contradictions and must not be subject to an analysis that seeks to explain ideas decoupled from their historical context.

Moving to another controversial topic related to the period spent in foreign countries, part of the scholarly literature has claimed that Malcolm X embraced a socialist ideology during the African trips. As briefly discussed in the third chapter, the socialist tendencies of African revolutionaries and the centrality of capitalism in the oppressive American system unsurprisingly brought Malcolm X to sympathize with socialism, but there is not sufficient evidence to claim that he went beyond a mere appreciation. More likely, since many of the African leaders he looked up to as models for the domestic struggle were socialists, Goldman suggested that "to the extent that he identified with them, he identified with their politics as well."[436] Moreover, it might be argued that Malcolm X despised capitalism more than he ever approved socialism: for instance, when in January 1965 he was asked about the worldwide struggle between the two systems, Malcolm X answered without ever mentioning socialism, but only denouncing capitalism.[437] In light of these reflections, it could be assumed that travel did not affect decisively his ideological development with regard to political and economic

[433] Burrow, "Malcolm X Was Not a Racist," p. 106.

[434] Among these, Raymond Rodgers and Jimmie N. Rogers published a paper in 1983 in which, through the quantitative technique of evaluative assertion analysis, they studied three speeches pronounced by Malcolm X at Harvard University in different phases of his life (March 1961, March 1964 and December 1964) to "determine the degree and direction of change (if any) in the attitude of Malcolm X toward whites as manifested in his public utterances": the results showed that in 1961, 99 percent of his assertions were "unfavourable," while three years later they decreased to 98 percent in March and 87 percent in December (Rodger Jimmie N. and Rodgers Raymond, "The Evolution of the Attitude of Malcolm X Toward Whites," *Phylon*, XLIV, 2 [1983], pp. 108-115, p. 110, 114).

[435] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 406.

[436] Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 233.

[437] On this occasion, but exemplificative of his general stance, Malcolm X addressed capitalism in an extremely critical tone. Part of the answer was: "It is impossible for capitalism to survive, primarily because the system of capitalism needs some blood to suck. Capitalism used to be like an eagle, but now it is more like a vulture. […] As the nations of the world free themselves, then capitalism has less victims, less blood to suck, and it becomes weaker and weaker. It is only a matter of time in my opinion before it will collapse completely" (Clark, *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 127).

systems: the African meetings he had with socialist-leaning leaders probably pulled him toward the Left, but, again, it was probably more about rejecting capitalism than anything else.

Maybe the most important aspect of the international experience, at least in terms of commitment, the plan involving the United Nations and the denunciation of the African Americans' human rights violation was undoubtedly a central project in Malcolm X's last year, but it was not an idea that emerged abroad: in the analysis of "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech of early April 1964, it has been shown that the option to evade the American jurisdiction and to appeal to international tribunals had been considered prior to the departure for Mecca. There is no doubt that the countless interactions in Africa and in the Middle East must have enriched the plan Malcolm X had conceived in America, but it can be quite safely concluded that it was not a subject born out of the trips of 1964 or one that greatly affected his ideological development. If anything, its pursuit was one of the (if not the) main reasons that prompted him to plan the travels.

In addition to the changes mentioned so far, the list of ideas that Malcolm X revisited during the approximately seven month spent abroad between April 1964 and February 1965 is long and diverse, ranging from the philosophy of black nationalism to the role of women in society.[438] In the same way, beliefs such as the pride in the African roots of black Americans, the steadfast opposition to both American political parties, the denunciation of integration, segregation, nonviolence, and many more all remained untouched by the international experiences.

In sum, scholars have been right to ascribe great significance to travel in the ideological development of Malcolm X during the last year of his life, but this thesis sought to prove that entering the international stage was just one of the elements that contributed to his complex reassessment of thought occurred starting from early 1964: so, in an attempt to grasp the changes in their entirety, it was deemed necessary to provide a comprehensive analysis of Malcolm X's whole life, with a marked, but not exclusive, focus on the last twelve months. Overall, and keeping in mind that the international mindset was already present in the Black

[438] About the second, Malcolm X moved away from his earlier misogynistic belief that women were subordinate to men to embrace an understanding of societal development that depended on women's emancipation. In December 1964 he declared: "One thing I noticed in both the Middle East and Africa, in every country that was progressive, the women were progressive. In every country that was underdeveloped and backward, it was to the same degree that women were [underdeveloped] and backward. […] So in the African countries where they opt for mass education, whether it be male or female, you find that they have a more valid society, a more progressive society" (Perry, *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches*, pp. 17-18).

Muslim years, the first travel of 1964 to the Middle East and Africa appears to have been the most influential experience (even though, it is worth repeating one last time, its study should not rely on an uncritical reading of Malcolm X's accounts), while the second one had a more limited ideological impact since it consisted mainly of a lobbying campaign. Finally, the trips to Europe represented an opportunity for Malcolm X to unveil to what degree his viewpoints had changed toward the end of his life, so it was not a matter of change as much as of reflection on his own thought.

To conclude, what this thesis (and the scholarly literature in general) has not been able to properly address was the travel in July 1959. Additional research on this foreign experience, possibly based on new and revealing sources, could be ground-breaking in expanding even further the knowledge on the significance of the international context in Malcolm X's evolving ideology because, as he never failed to repeat in the final months of his life, "travel does broaden one's soul."[439]

[439] Perry, *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches*, p. 91.

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