

CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**DEVELOPING A METHOD OF MALCOLM
“A DIALECTICAL EXCHANGE OF INTERSECTING TRADITIONS”**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis builds off of the premise that the Muslim community in America is in need of a dialectical shift that is uniquely Malcolmian in its content and considerations, as a means to solve a number of its political and Intellectual shortcomings that are a result of its social and ideological situatedness. I seek to encourage a reimagination of the Islamic tradition and its position in America through a considerate historical narrative, and a reinvigorated contemporary vision which centers Malcolm. In order to accomplish this this thesis is an effort to establish Malcolm as a school of thought, a tradition, as other intellectuals have done by their own efforts or the works of their successors. This is done through an identification of the traditions which informed Malcolm and which he represented. In this process it is not only an attempt to make a method of Malcolm, but it is to increase the legibility of the traditions he represented for the reader, while further imagining what a developed conversation between those traditions look like, as separate and as synthesized entities. In the case of this essay the traditions which Malcolm most saliently represented are the Islamic tradition and the black radical tradition. I make the case that Malcolm represents a highpoint in the confluence of both traditions, which I argue have always had a connectivity, from the black radical tradition's outset. While I also state that no intelligent Islamic discourse, nor radical discourse can ignore this

confluence. Lastly, I outline a number of the means and sources from which a contemporary Malcomian discourse can be derived, in order to authentically represent this confluence in adequate intellectual and practical terms.

With Gratitude to Allah, His Messenger ﷺ

**my spiritual predecessors, my teachers, my family, and my righteous ancestors who
prior to them bore me.**

**As hopes and prayers toward a sound and beneficial Islamic discourse and a
discourse about the things essential to human life.**

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CHAPTER 1.

MALCOLM AND, THE HISTORY OF ISLAM IN AMERICA, AND THE MUSLIM AMERICAN POLITICAL CONTEXT TODAY

The Muslim political context is robustly complex. It encompasses over two billion individuals across thousands of locales and a multitude of languages, there exists a shared global political context in which Islam has struggled to express itself in the post-Cold War era—an era that left America as the sole hegemonic political power on Earth. Due to its diversity and its geographical location at the heart of the global empire, the Muslim American political context is a microcosm of the broader global Muslim experience. Coming from a multi-generational Muslim family that emerged from the antebellum South and the Jim Crow era, my family history bears witness to the transformations of America—both on its Black communities and, later, its Muslim communities. Just as the changes in America have affected its Black population, they have also had structural and relational effects, both domestically and internationally, on other groups, including the Muslim community.

The importance of Malcolm is multifold: it is in his personage, his historical significance, and his programmatic approach. His narrative allows for an aspirant in religious and political striving to see an example of the complexities but also the possibilities that lie within the human struggle toward the ideal aims of these subjects. His place in history is significant because, unconsciously, just as a fact of his existence, he sits at the ends of many histories in their linear time developments but also in the convergence of these phenomena: Black, White, West, East, Muslim, Christian,

Nationalist, Internationalist, etc. He simultaneously represents the Black radical tradition and Islamic tradition and galvanized their conscious reconvergence. He sits between convergence and contradictions, forming a productive synthesis that provides an intelligible form of lived life. His personage represents an ideal self by which individuals who share some principles or identity can recognize a proximate self, allowing them to engage in the principled identity of Islam and/or a radical political approach. An individual can occupy one end of the spectrum that Malcolm represented and see a living connectivity to his other aspects, which billions of people embody. By this, his personage is a bridge of peoples and a bulwark against sectarianism, factionalism, dogmatism, and other divisive isms that further collective human regression in the face of oppressive systemic onslaughts.

His programmatic approach extends from his ethic in that it was about a sincere exposition of truth, the maintenance and advancement of the well-being of peoples, and holding up contradictory subjects and synthesizing them where they may be. Malcolm's synthetic approach was not just a hodgepodge of thought, nor was it a wanton approach to knowledge or liberation. It was the development of a synthesis that existed within the Black radical tradition prior to his life, that had unconscious ties to the Islamic world tradition, and that would be further fused with the Black tradition as Islam—its possibilities, ethics, and meanings—became more integrated with the Black struggle.

The relationship between Islam and the Americas is old. It has been argued by, Ivan Van Sertima that there was a Muslim presence in the Americas before Columbus¹, but we know of the first documented individual of Muslim origin in the Americas: Estevanico, also known as Mustafa Al-Semouri, a North African navigator.² He was a Black Arabic-speaking slave sold to Spanish adventurers and then baptized, permitting him to journey to the Western Hemisphere³. His status was somewhat dubious in that he facilitated the conquering mission of Westerners against the indigenous population.⁴ On the other hand, the first slave revolt in the Americas was conducted by Senegambian Muslims on the island of Haiti against the grandson of Columbus.⁵ Such events represent the historical and dialectical tension housed in the Islamic identity that would come to exist today. They also represent the tensions that existed at the time between Muslims on the African continent—some facilitating the trade, some fighting it, while others were perhaps caught up in it by means of political expediency and a desire to survive.⁶ However, to the extent that the strivings of people, and Muslims in particular on the African continent, can be identified with those in the Western Hemisphere, we can cite a

¹ Ivan Van Sertima, *They Came before Columbus: The African Presence in Ancient America* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2003), 39.

² Michael A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7.

³ Gomez, *Black Crescent*, 7.

⁴ Gomez, *Black Crescent*, 7.

⁵ Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*, 15th Anniversary ed. (New York; London: NYU Press, 2013), 39.

⁶Sylviane A. Diouf, *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), 143.

historical continuity of the Black radical tradition stemming back to the first African colonial encounters with the West or reactions to the overall emergent political context. For instance, one finds in smaller instances freedom movements against the slave trade in the Hobo towns of Sierra Leone,⁷ the Bilalian freedom movement,⁸ and the much larger-scale freedom movement of Abdul Kader Khan, in which he abolished the slave trade.⁹ In his realm, he blocked the slave trade of the French and virtually abolished the practice of slavery through mass manumission.¹⁰

Though the timeline of transmission is seemingly discontinued, as the Islam of those resistant slaves would not be transmitted to their descendants,¹¹ insofar as the movements of the 20th century are a result of the productive synthesis of a Black and Muslim consciousness, they should be seen as having a relationship of continuity. Enslaved Africans of Muslim origin continued to exist in the Americas until the 19th century, then died out. Inhabitants of Sapelo Island in the 1930s could recall their grandparents' practice of Islamic rituals, but they themselves did not express a firm connection to the faith or religion.¹²

⁷ Diouf, *Fighting the Slave Trade*, 144.

⁸ Diouf, *Fighting the Slave Trade*, 144.

⁹ Rudolph T. Ware, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 114.

¹⁰ Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, 114.

¹¹ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 25.

¹² Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 83.

The first publicly prominent white American Muslim, Alexander Russell Webb, converted to Islam in 1889 and died in 1916, but there seems to be sparing social continuity between his Islamic life and the boom of Islamic movements that emerged in the 20th century.¹³

Other American white folks would convert prior too, but their stories are of an obscurer nature.¹⁴

Islam first appeared in a mass form in the 1920s under the Moorish Science Temple, which garnered up to 30,000 members.¹⁵ It articulated a moral and nationalist philosophy that framed American Negroes as having Moorish origins.¹⁶ Their political philosophy was conservative, but if one understands early Black nationalism from the Civil War until the Progressive Era, one would know this was the dominant trend.¹⁷ The second group was the Nation of Islam. There was shared contextual and membership overlap between these two groups and Marcus Garvey's organization the UNIA.¹⁸

The Nation of Islam, was by far the most widely recognized Islamic movement emerging from America, with Malcolm X as its national spokesman, and after him

¹³ Umar F. Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America: The Life of Alexander Russell Webb* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 20.

¹⁴ Abd-Allah, *A Muslim in Victorian America*, 15.

¹⁵ Aminah Beverly McCloud, *African American Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 11.

¹⁶ McCloud, 12.

¹⁷ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism: 1850–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10.

¹⁸ McCloud, 34.

Farrakhan along with its celebrity representative Muhammad Ali. It would establish communities nationally, having an estimated number between 50-100,000 members, as well as possessing assets evaluating its holdings to be near 50 million dollars.¹⁹ It would receive prominence at the height of the civil rights era and would influence it by providing an alternative modality of resistance to racism, one that was separatist and militant.²⁰ This caused reactions which influenced the movement's culture as well as the establishment's reaction to the movement, facilitating the concessions made for civil rights in order to mitigate the revolutionary fervor of the time.²¹ Though the N.O.I did not take clear political stances and avoided direct action, their impact with Malcolm X at the helm, would be that of a vanguard in the civil rights and emerging black power struggle.²² Farrakhan, in taking over the leadership of the reassembled NOI, after its conversion later, would reify this history with events like the million man march in the 90s²³, and a subsequent one in 2015 at the onset of the black lives matter movement.²⁴

These early Muslim movements in Dr. Jackson's framing, were proto-Islamic movements that appropriated Islam but did not particularly filter their expressions through orthodox teachings, as many of their main tenets on divinity and prophecy

¹⁹ Ernest Allen Jr., "Religious Heterodoxy and Nationalist Tradition: The Continuing Evolution of the Nation of Islam," *The Black Scholar* 26, no. 3-4 (1996): 2-34.

²⁰ McCloud, 29.

²¹ McCloud, 53.

²² McCloud, 53.

²³ Adelle M. Banks, "Farrakhan 'Justice or Else' Rally Reaches Beyond 'Black Lives Matter'," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 13, 2015, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/farrakhan-justice-or-else-rally-reaches-beyond-black-lives-matter>.

²⁴ Banks, "Farrakhan 'Justice or Else' Rally."

largely contradicted the core tenets of normative global Islam.²⁵ However, at the time, there were a number of orthodox or quasi-orthodox Islamic expressions, but they did not garner the mass appeal of the NOI and MST.²⁶ Sunni Islam would not gain significant popularity until after Malcolm's death, seeing its largest boom when Imam Warith Deen Muhammad led his Nation of Islam following into the mainstream global Islamic community in 1975.²⁷

As Islam in America became increasingly orthodox in its expression, it had to undergo a variety of considerations not previously encountered. The previous teleological locomotive for Islam in America was 'black religion', that particular religious disposition whose aim was to subvert the machinations of white supremacy and the extent to which it defined life. This phenomenon of black religion is coextensive with the phenomenon of the black radical tradition, though the latter can be deemed as more comprehensive. Amongst those new considerations would be the reconstruction of authority and priority. Before, the orthodox expansion in America authority was distributed toward the charismatic messianic type figure, somewhat in cultic fashion. Thereafter, no longer could a claim to Islam and its global community be made without rigorous recourse to its core texts and interpretive tradition.²⁸ As a result the religious authority of the community would largely shift overseas, either directly through persons or indirectly to literature or

²⁵ ?

²⁶ McCloud, 38-40

²⁷ Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011),3.

²⁸ Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 4.

frameworks that were deemed as being more in line with the authentic Islamic expression. This would be the case more poignantly with African American Muslim communities such as the salafi movement or the Dar-al-Islam movement.²⁹ The religious authority of Imam Muhammad was maintained in his community, but it would be subject to challenge internally and externally due to this phenomenon.³⁰

It would also be the case that Imam Muhammad, took a less politically boisterous stance and encouraged his followers toward a more assimilationist mode of practice, which came with both gains and losses.³¹ Its gains would mean greater socioeconomic stability and perhaps avoidance of the massive state repression that his community once received, allowing it to maintain a survivable posture.³² One loss though was that orthodox Black Muslims who transitioned from the Nation of Islam were no longer the primary public voice for Black Muslims in America, as prior to Black Islam played a defining role in the Black radical tradition and expression.³³ That role went to Farrakhan, who still preserved the association of Islam with the Black radical tradition, but not in a way that fully synthesized the considerations Malcolm had been navigating. Rather, it was a nationalism/internationalism largely in the spirit of what Elijah Muhammad had aspired to—though Farrakhan would prove the more effective public speaker than his predecessor. His approach was politically conservative, avoiding direct political action,

²⁹ Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 49.

³⁰ Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 50.

³¹ Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 50.

³² Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 50.

³³ Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 77.

non-orthodox in its particularist religious views, and largely racialized in organization. It did not provide a greater leftist united front, across racial and ideological lines, which Malcolm had worked to inspire in groups like the Black Panther Party.³⁴

All of this serves to illustrate that the Black orthodox Muslim voice did not maintain its position as a primary cultural definer, despite being on the cusp of assuming that role, in the life of Malcolm. This is not a marginal point, and its residuals can be seen in the Islamic influence in hip-hop. One must recognize the many famous rappers who were Muslim or heavily influenced by Islam. Consider Public Enemy and its Nation of Islam influence, or the major impact of the Five Percent Nation on hip-hop, seen in the work of Rakim, Nas, and the Wu-Tang Clan—whose members, such as Raekwon and Ghostface, were orthodox Muslims³⁵. One also cannot forget The influence stretches beyond the East Coast, with the southern Goodie Mob’s heavy Islamic inspiration producing tracks like “In Sha Allah”.

A connection closer to Malcolm would be the legacy of the Shakur family—a revolutionary family, not all of whom were blood relatives, but whose most famous member was Tupac Shakur.³⁶ The family patriarch, Salahuddin Shakur, was a member of Malcolm X’s Mosque, Inc. and the OAAU.³⁷ As that organization disintegrated after

³⁴ Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom beyond America*(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 68.

³⁵ Daulatzai, 14.

³⁶ Santi Elijah Holley, *An Amerikan Family: The Shakurs and the Nation They Created* (New York: Mariner Books, 2024),13-20.

³⁷ Holley, *An Amerikan Family*, 13-20.

Malcolm's death, he became a critically supportive elder for the Harlem Black Panther Party's youth, among whom his sons—Zayd and Lumumba Abdul Shakur—became leaders. Other famous Shakurs include Mutulu Shakur, Assata Shakur, Afeni Shakur, and Sekou Odinga, who did not take the Shakur name but whose son, Yaki Kadafi, would rap alongside Tupac in the 1990s.³⁸

Though Tupac was raised in the aftermath of much of the political drama of the '60s and early '70s, he grew up within the overall familial structure of the Shakur lineage. His stepfather was Mutulu Shakur, and he was surrounded by communal and familial ties to the movement.³⁹ His politicization and social consciousness were not self-invented but inherited, and his attempt to reclaim and subvert terms like "thug" and "nigga" by imbuing them with consciousness was directly influenced by the counsel of his then-incarcerated Muslim stepfather, Mutulu.⁴⁰

Needless to say, the Malcolmian effect on American culture was not marginal, nor was his Islamic influence. In an era where Islam appears to be trending upward once again, it could benefit from a critical engagement with this history.

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, immigrant and black American Muslims would coalesce. However, social worldviews differed, though they often converged. Some of the earliest Ahmadi Muslim newspapers written by Indian immigrants critiqued American racism, though this critique seemed directed more toward

³⁸ Holley, *An Amerikan Family*, 13-20.

³⁹ Holley, *An Amerikan Family*, 13-20.

⁴⁰ Holley, *An Amerikan Family*, 13-20.

efforts to proselytize toward blacks than address systemic racism⁴¹. In the 60s, among members of the Muslim Brotherhood—a group considered radical in much of the Muslim world—there was an effort to downplay the racial divide in America. Evidence of this can be found in Malcolm’s engagement with Muslim college students and Yusuf Shawarbi, one of the individuals who facilitated his orthodox conversion. They saw much of his racial justice emphasis as an aberration, shaped by his environment—something they assumed he would eventually abandon.⁴²Malcolm’s response was clear: no religion would cause him to forget the suffering inflicted by systemic white supremacy.⁴³

It is also important to note that in America, much of the Muslim immigrant community pursued routes to wealth that were not available to Muslim immigrants elsewhere in the West, nor to Black American Muslims. During the Cold War, visas were granted with an emphasis on those who could intellectually contribute on America's behalf under the H-1 visa program.⁴⁴ This contributed to the stereotype of brown immigrants to America as doctors and engineers rather than low class laborers or welfare recipients.⁴⁵

This bourgeoisification, of course, gave the Muslim community a different lens through which to view America. This is not to say that Muslims who acquired wealth did

⁴¹ McCloud, 18.

⁴² Louis A. DeCaro, *On the Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X* (New York: NYU Press, 1995), 242.

⁴³ DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 242.

⁴⁴ Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 16-17.

⁴⁵ Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 16-17.

not have internal contradictions within their communities, but their routes to economic well-being differed, and it opened different possibilities for a socio-political identity than that of the African American Muslim. Islam in America emerged at first from the descendants of enslaved Africans, who became struggling wage laborers as well as the formerly incarcerated. For immigrant Muslims, however, their entry into the country was often as economic or political refugees. In these instances, the East, although the place of origin and definition, paradoxically, was something to be liberated from, while for many Black Muslims, it was something to be liberated by.

What should be acknowledged, however, is the necessary political continuity between these two experiences. If not for the civil rights and labor struggles fought by radicals in the American context, the landing ground for these political and economic migrants would not have been attainable—certainly not as accommodating as it was.⁴⁶ It should also be noted that historically, middle classes can be rendered defunct, and capital must be able to secure itself and establish its own relations.

Muslim institutions, in the advent of 9/11, faced serious onslaught and risks, and the isolation and the bourgeoisification of these Muslim communities only served to further their marginalization, as they were a means of separating them from the popular masses, and, for lack of better words indigenized black Islamic praxis⁴⁷. A serious historical, practical, and relational re-engagement with the Black radical tradition and its

⁴⁶ Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 16-17.

⁴⁷ Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 16-17.

adherents can provide the kind of political education and relationships that would facilitate their maintenance.

We are now out of the 9/11 era in the sense that the politics that predominated the Muslim community have shifted, as has the broader political context in which they were situated. For one, we have moved beyond the neoliberal era of unipolar American political dominance⁴⁸. This era coincided with the post-racial moment, the unipolar American hegemonic moment, and the height of perceived American exceptionalism.⁴⁹ Now, the cover of racism has been completely lifted, the illusion of American exceptionalism has been thoroughly debunked, and the U.S. no longer holds the same geopolitical dominance it once did. America's relationship with its own citizenry is shifting, with the explicit hijacking of democratic structures by figures like Musk and his cronies. Furthermore, its relationship with Western allies in NATO has also changed, particularly in light of Trump's new Ukrainian developments.⁵⁰

Since the events of October 7th, the genocide against the Palestinians—and America's complicity in it—has shifted the political gaze of both Americans and American Muslims. No longer is the U.S. simply seen as a land of prosperity and hope; rather, it is viewed through a more politically realist lens, often tinged with cynicism. In

⁴⁸ Jake Sullivan, "The Era of Neoliberal U.S. Foreign Policy Is Over," *Foreign Policy*, May 18, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/18/neoliberal-foreign-policy-biden-sullivan/>.

⁴⁹ Sullivan, "The Era of Neoliberal U.S. Foreign Policy Is Over."

⁵⁰Courtney Kube and Carol E. Lee, "Trump Administration Considers Giving NATO Command Exclusively to American General," *NBC News*, March 19, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/trump-admin-considers-giving-nato-command-exclusively-american-eisenho-rcna196503>.

this era, the Muslim community is once again making a leftward turn. In my estimation, this is the first time since the 1960s that the American Muslim community has fully occupied a place on the popular left. While the Muslim community has leaned left on certain issues since then, a truly leftist character—one that is anti-imperialist, internationalist, and anti-capitalist—has not taken thorough expression until now, particularly in a way that shapes the broader left.

I make a distinction here between the left and liberalism. Much of what has been called the "Muslim left" would be more accurately described as liberal, and liberalism has the propensity to shift right. The true distinction, in my estimation, is that the true 'left' views the structure of the system as defunct and holds a revolutionary outlook, whereas liberalism retains admiration for the structure and superstructure of society. This is not to say that there is no overlap or nuance within individuals, but these two orientations are distinct. A revolutionary audacity may settle for reform, but a reformist audacity is likely to settle for far less.

Now, with the contradictions of the moment exposed and the sheets being lifted from Klansmen, there is no returning to the haze of prior eras. The need today for a Malcolmian method has been elevated with the utmost seriousness because it has become apparent that much of what he vied for was true and necessary.

Islam first gained popular notice in America through the rise of the Nation of Islam, with Malcolm X as its spokesman. As stated, this form of Islam was not recognized as orthodox by world's adherents of the Islamic religion. By 1964, Malcolm

X had broken from the Nation of Islam, identifying with orthodox Islam⁵¹. He structurally framed orthodox Islam as adjacent to—or even catalytic for—the global liberation of the world’s colonized peoples.⁵²

In this moment, Malcolm built coalitions with diverse groups of people moving toward decolonization: secularists, revolutionaries, reformists, religious figures, socialists, Marxists, capitalists, nationalists, and others—many of these identities overlapping.⁵³ Since then, there has not been an identifiable dynamism within Islam or among Muslim leaders comparable to Malcolm’s influence. Instead, Islam, particularly its orthodox expression, and its leaders became more obscure in relation to the American political scene, only returning to prominence after 9/11.⁵⁴ However, the predominant trend since has been largely accommodationist, and to the extent that it is radical, it is often geographically dislocated in its vision.⁵⁵

As a result of the Frankenstein-like presentation of religion from the imperial core, the left and political progressives have largely lost a religious centering that grants purpose, strength, and morality. This centering was prominent in the 1960s when Dr. King and Malcolm were the axis of the movement.⁵⁶ This loss is particularly problematic

⁵¹ Decaro, 199.

⁵² Decaro, 212.

⁵³ William W. Sales, *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation: Malcolm X and the Organization of Afro-American Unity* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1994), 14.

⁵⁴ Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 53.

⁵⁵ Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 4.

⁵⁶ Decaro, 221.

because individuals and their ideas become less intelligible to one another. The cooperative alterity necessary to bring forth justice between peoples is lost, and thus movements intended to liberate often scapegoat or render invisible some groups, adopting reactionary, hegemonic, or even fascistic arguments against them. This has caused particular damage to movements of justice in America, allowing the legacy of American atrocities, both global and national, to persist.

The argument of this paper is that in the person and practice of Malcolm, we find a solution. However, it is important to recognize the traditions he represents, their transformations, and the traditions he holds as essential—namely, the Islamic tradition and the Black radical tradition. It is easier for people to conceive of him as a representative of the latter but harder for most to conceive of him in the same way regarding the Islamic tradition. We will re-engage this later, but it is only difficult to conceive of Malcolm as part of defining or in continuity with the Islamic tradition if one only conceives of the Islamic tradition purely in its bookish form, identified by its experts. However, when the structures, the moments, and the people who facilitated the emergence of that Islamic textual tradition are conceived of as necessary elements of that tradition, then it becomes clear that Malcolm represents this for the contemporary period with continuity to the past. This is especially evident as he establishes connections to the traditional centers of Islamic learning and various traditional peoples of the Islamic world.

Malcolm was an individual who connected this global body. He served as a unifying figure for groups of oppressed people with common interests but differentiated intellectual paradigms—political, religious, and cultural. Malcolm X, born Malcolm

Little and also known as Al Hajj Malik Shabazz, was a point of value and imagination for many traditions: religious, irreligious, socialist, cultural nationalists etc. The truth is, Malcolm was complex, often authentically representing each tradition that lays claim to him. Yet, due to his nuance, his work cannot be fully appreciated through any singular lens.

Malcolm X was born to Earl and Louise Little, a family of religiously oriented activists in Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).⁵⁷ The UNIA was a Black internationalist and Pan-African group seeking to economically and politically uplift Black Americans through a Pan-African platform. By 1920, the UNIA had 1,100 chapters in 40 countries, including the UK, Cuba, Panama, Costa Rica, and Ghana.⁵⁸ By 1926, its membership had grown to over 11 million, making it the largest Black organization in history.⁵⁹ This movement, influenced by Booker T. Washington, would later shape the Nation of Islam's platform.⁶⁰ Malcolm initially believed his father to be a Baptist traveling preacher, as stated in his autobiography. However, according to Louis DeCaro, Malcolm's eldest brother, Wilfred Little, clarified that their father was an activist using the preacher's platform to spread the Garvey movement.⁶¹ His mother was an eclectic Christian, drawing from various denominations and encouraging her children to engage in their own inquiries about God. This eclecticism likely laid the groundwork

⁵⁷ DeCaro, 13.

⁵⁸ DeCaro, 13.

⁵⁹ DeCaro, 13.

⁶⁰ DeCaro, 292.

⁶¹ DeCaro, 52.

for Malcolm's later openness to various religious traditions. Though eclectic the Little household believed in a unitarian view of Jesus, seeing him as a prophet,⁶² something which facilitated the families transition to Islam.

Malcolm's father's activities drew the attention of the Ku Klux Klan, leading to persecution, the firebombing of their house, and ultimately his father's assassination. These events drove his mother to a mental breakdown and subjected the family to further racial violence, systemic oppression, and separation through foster care.⁶³ This traumatic upbringing introduced Malcolm to intimate forms of racialized oppression. Despite excelling in school, he was told he could never aspire to be more than a carpenter because he was a "nigger".⁶⁴

During his early teens, Malcolm reunited with his elder sister Ella, a product of his father's previous relationship. He spent his teenage years in Boston, working as a dishwasher and Pullman porter while also dabbling in illegal activities, including hustling, steering, and robbery.⁶⁵ These experiences exposed him to the full spectrum of labor amongst the Black lower class. Eventually, his criminal activities led to imprisonment, where he served six and a half years in Massachusetts state correctional facilities.⁶⁶

⁶² Decaro, 52.

⁶³ Decaro, 53

⁶⁴ Decaro, 54.

⁶⁵ Decaro,56.

⁶⁶ Decaro, 73.

In prison, Malcolm underwent a profound transformation. Initially a staunch atheist, cursing God while recovering from addiction.⁶⁷ He trained himself in prison to go from functional illiteracy to literary fluency. In Prison he would gain access to a wide array of literature, which helped to reform himself. He joined the prison debate team, honing his skills in discussing religious and political topics.⁶⁸ He also connected with the broader Third World liberation movement, identifying himself as a communist in a letter to President Truman during the Cold War⁶⁹. His brother Reginald introduced him to the Nation of Islam (NOI), a religious nationalist-separatist organization that resonated with Malcolm's Garveyite upbringing. During his tenure in the NOI, Malcolm rose to the rank of national spokesman, founded the organization's newspaper, and helped expand its influence and membership.⁷⁰

However, familial, religious, and political tensions, along with internal scandals and rivalries, led to Malcolm's disassociation from the NOI. This schism broadened Malcolm's horizons, enabling him to imagine a more inclusive coalition of activism.⁷¹ Though, from 1959, his public appearances already displayed the seeds of his broader political analysis, evident in his reflections on the Bandung Conference, multi-coalitional organizing, and engagement with leaders like Fidel Castro and Gamal Abdel Nasser.⁷²

⁶⁷ Decaro, 75.

⁶⁸ Decaro, 86

⁶⁹ Decaro, 115.

⁷⁰ Decaro, 6.

⁷¹ Decari, 251

⁷² Decaro, 138.

Before his assassination, Malcolm sought to establish structures that addressed both the religious and sociopolitical needs of Black Americans. Muslim Mosque Inc. focused on orthodox Islamic practice, while the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) practiced big-tent Black nationalism to address systemic Black political issues.⁷³ Simultaneously, he was involved with the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), founded by his associate Muhammad Ahmed.⁷⁴

Malcolm's life experiences became the foundation of his social critique and program. His early upbringing, street life, time in prison, his tenure in the NOI, and his embrace of orthodox Islam allowed him to connect with global struggles and articulate a vision for justice that remains relevant today. His life narrative connects the traditions of Islam and the black Radical tradition as an overlapping phenomenon, from which if adequate thought is garnered from, the problematics of oppression would be much more readily solved.

⁷³ Decaro, 226.

⁷⁴ Sales, 50.

CHAPTER 2.

MALCOLM AS A TRADITION AND BETWEEN TRADITIONS: TRADITIONALISM, THE BLACK RADICAL TRADITION, AND THE ISLAMIC TRADITION

This thesis seeks to articulate Islam's intellectual tradition in a manner that is both accessible and meaningful across diverse audiences, facilitating its transmission across cultures. The intent is to equip Muslim thinkers with the tools to engage critically with observable reality, advancing understanding through rigorous discourse and dialectical engagement with other disciplines of knowledge. By dialectical I mean dialogical and that terms and ideas are expressed, debated, and determined between interlocutors, and the terms and interlocutors represent phenomena that reach far beyond their immediate discussion. This dialectical phenomenon of knowledge also implies something metaphysical, in that creative production and resolution, beyond the creation of things ex nihilo, is always interactive and codependent upon the forces that are being interacted with.

This dialectical approach I am attempting to center, in my estimation, is a necessary means by which disagreed-upon terms, whose meanings and usages change over time, can be understood, transmitted, and practiced with an intentional ethic grounded in Islamic scripture, its interpretive tradition, and an intention motivated toward social benefit for now and future generations, letting us understand the past, present, and plan for the future. It is an approach to at once be liberatory and at once be more, because liberation is the removal of a condition and a relationship, an ever necessary act, but

though there is the necessity of liberation , there is life and perspectives before and beyond it.

The progress of oppressed people, Muslims of the Global South included, has consistently been sought after since ancient times. Yet in each moment or movement that seeks some terms of liberation there can be some identified perceived failings, either in that a material victory was not achieved or that the material victory did not fulfill the ideological terms of liberation. It is my argument that struggles for liberation, but also solutions for life's problems in general fail because they lack a sound enough dialectical method. This point is not my own per se, but can be found in the thought of Freire, as he frames the non dialogical model of education as the banking, invested, model of popular education, which seeks to reinforce status quo, not develop thought or bring forth collective benefit.¹ In this approach ideological mechanisms for development are imposed, statically imagined, and logistically and epistemologically inconsiderate of the true needs of the people.

However this argument can be extended to any approach to knowledge which mimics this pattern, philosophical-epistemological systematic approaches that do not subject its framework to inquiry or rational critique, but rather impose its categories as absolute and salutary. IN essence I would assert that the essential difference in character between the banking model of knowledge and the liberatory one is in their anti dialectical and dialectical natures. It is also the dialectical nature of knowledge here which facilitates praxis; the ability to better alter one's terms of theory after an experience that disproves

¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1970),12.

the theory. Praxis is ultimately important here of course for liberatory terms when peoples are oppressed, but it is necessary for benefit in general. One could imagine the field of medicine without a sound medical praxis; it would be a practice that facilitated more death than healing.

There are in current times a number of epistemologies and approaches to Muslim life and communal liberation, many of which escape clear categorization but which can be seen as lying on a spectrum of “traditionalist” to “modernist”.² The distinction between the two being that the former views the past in preferential terms and the latter views the future in preferential terms. So in summation the construction of the world ought to be on the bases of received terms, while neologisms and emerging intellectual artifacts and categories ought to be viewed with suspicion, unless they can be imagined through the past, or having had some justifiable place in it. For the modernist the future is coextensive with some realized progress, and so that which is perceived as being from the past, must have some contemporary mainstream categorization that justifies its existence today.

I do contend with the notion that being traditional means being traditionalist. Dr Jackson raises our awareness to the fact that tradition is not received without some influence of each successive generation³. Dr Umar Abdallah also brings our attention to the fact that to be traditional does not mean to be anti-modern, but tradition is meant to be

² Jackson, 87. Use full citation the first time you use a source in a new chapter. Shortened citation can be used thereafter.

³ Nguyen, 55. See above.

purposefully situated in time and space.⁴In my best estimation, to be traditional is to adequately have continuity with the past in a way that is present for the moment, and preparatory for the future. It is to be in adequate dialectic with space and time, utilizing a received framework that if true, should be subject of inquiry, and should be evocative of any observable truism, to the extent that the framework is not limited. The Islamic intellectual tradition, having no church, but a shared lineage which spread transregionally, asserted itself dialectically. This was the case in all of the foundational disciplines from the beginning including: hadith, grammar, linguistics, theology, and law⁵. It is my understanding given all of this that Islam, its tradition, and consequently the intellectual ethic of a Muslim, is dialectical.

To the extent to which an approach to knowledge is non-dialectical it vacates the actual account of the terms of subject matters that are discussed. What one is left with is caricature, rhetoric, and half truths which can not bring adequate resolution. And based off of what has been understood of Islam as a dialectical tradition, insofar as an Islamic approach is non dialectic it lacks something of the Islamic.

I am somewhat inspired by an effort made by Kwame Nkrumah in his work *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution*, in which he considered the three main

⁴ Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, "Islam and the Cultural Imperative," The Nawawi Foundation, 2004, accessed March 21, 2025, <https://www.theoasisinitiative.org/islam-the-cultural-imperative>., 1-5.

⁵ Edward, Walter. "Dialectic in The Religious Sciences," in *Brill Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 3, edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Devin J. Stewart, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 2.

ideological currents amongst African peoples: African traditional religions, Christianity, and Islam. He sought to bring them together—not by vacating or transforming the meanings of their traditions per se, but by setting up their cooperation through a dialectic whose framework was socialist, materialist, and humanistic.⁶ This notion and his life praxis represented a uniquely unifying framework. However, it is not the one I wish to directly pursue, as I intend to emphasize another figure and another metaphysic, one that is new and can be fully identified as Muslim.

I will do this by identifying the constitutive parts of a traditionally validated dialectical approach to theoretical and practical Islamic thought through a centering of Malcolm X, also known as Al-Hajj Malik Shabazz. In his ethic, thought, and praxis, we find an unsystematized dialectical approach that needs to be formulated for a productive Islamic discourse in the Western Hemisphere and the globe.

Much of Malcolm's charisma lied in him simultaneously representing the old traditional ideal of *tabsit* (simplification of knowledge) while bringing together a productive and unifying dialectic between the highest of discourses⁷. He had the capacity to speak in the obscure slang of the street hustler, and dismantle the academic expert in socio-political debate. When asked how he was able to debate at such a level he replied that his sincerity was his credentials⁸.

⁶Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism* (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 56.

⁷ Walead Mosaad, *Islam before Modernity* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2022), 6.

⁸ Sales, 238. Full citation needed.

Just over 60 years ago, Malcolm, at the founding rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), declared:

We declare our right on this earth... to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary.⁹

Today, he is still deeply revered in America for catalyzing a major cultural shift, and he is also a significant point still because what he sought and died for has not received a silencing resolution. His coined phrase, *by any means necessary*, a key term in his method, brings to mind the principle of necessity, which is an important principle of reason—not exclusive to, but established in the Islamic tradition, helping to demonstrate fact, an imperative, and motivate action.¹⁰ More specifically, the legal tradition of Islam holds a fundamental principle of pragmatic reason, which states that that which is necessary to fulfill an obligation is also necessary to do. It is my understanding that it is of social, political, and intellectual necessity to establish the thought, practice, and tradition of Malcolm X as a legible method and school of thought replicable for other generations.

In religious and secular terms, Malcolm is conceived of more as a moment and not a method, and as an ethic and not an educator. As a result, interpretations of Malcolm X in the political sense are largely interpreted in the context of Black nationalist and

⁹ Malcolm X, "Malcolm X's Speech at the Founding Rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity," June 28, 1964, reprinted in BlackPast.org, October 16, 2007, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1964-malcolm-x-s-speech-founding-rally-organization-afro-american-unity/>.

¹⁰ Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2010), 3.

internationalist resistance. Political interpreters are on the spectrum from detractors to admirers who interpret Malcolm through liberal or radical frameworks—nationalist, Pan-Africanist, socialist, revolutionary, etc.¹¹ While I would not agree with every interpretation of Malcolm, his broadness made him relevant to various peoples with varied analysis. However, to the extent that these analyses contain limited epistemologies, epistemologies that do not embody the epistemologies that Malcolm himself had, these Analyses would be limited. A materialist reading of Malcolm would disclude the religious, while a discourse in religious terms that were antagonist to a materialist reading would miss the logic of much of Malcolm's analyses.

In my lived experience Though there are people who deem Malcolm X their North Star and who, like me, would call themselves Malcolmite, to my knowledge, there is no popular notion of being considered a Malcolmite in the way one might be considered a Marxist, anarchist, or libertarian. If someone is a Malcolmite, there is often something else largely informing their politics, intellectual method, and other embodied expressions. Soon after Malcolm's death, his first interpreter and major speech publisher in text was George Breitman, a Marxist.¹² The first work that gave Malcolm a serious religious account was Louis DeCaro's *On the Side of My People*¹³. This took account of his early religious orientation as a Unitarian in belief, eclectic in orientation, which transformed through different iterations of Islam until he arrived at Orthodox Sunnism. A

¹¹ Decaro, 5. Full citation needed.

¹² Malcolm X and George Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 1.

¹³ Decaro, 3.

phenomenon that he did not seemingly have enough time to experience in its complexity and sectarianisms, though he sat with his fair share of sufis and salafis, the groups that represent the primary sunni division.

Malcolm never neatly fit into any directly received political philosophy though he identified as a black nationalist, with Pan Africanism becoming his more preferred term later.¹⁴

Though his political aims can be identified with Black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, Global South internationalism, and Islamic internationalism, he never took a completely Marxist line or adopted an altogether Islamist orientation, nor did he settle on a purely nationalist line.¹⁵ He would also expand his relationships and sense of diplomacy, saying in his last chapter of his autobiography that he had friends who considered themselves capitalists, yet he certainly was not ideologically liberal, capitalist, or secularist. It was the case that though he found his leanings to be with the radicals and revolutionaries of the world, he believed in coalition and community building with the non-ideologically aligned.¹⁶

Religiously, he is largely seen as the individual who popularized Orthodox Islam in America and inspired many toward it.¹⁷ However, his exact path of religious leadership

¹⁴ Sales, 82.

¹⁵ Sales, 134.

¹⁶ Sales, 134.

¹⁷ Decaro, 200.

is not found as the primary paradigm by which to construct a religious project in America or elsewhere.

This is understandable due to his short life and even shorter tenure as an independent political and Islamic leader. Most of his intellectual and political career was spent as the national spokesman of the Nation of Islam. After he broke from them and began to articulate his own path, he only lived less than one year.¹⁸ In this year he sought to make connections with the broader orthodox world, whose contours would probably not completely unveil themselves to him at the time. Much of this dilemma leads to contemporary debates over Malcolm's life, views, and predictions on how he would be viewed today.

Though it may take some forensic work to understand Malcolm, I posit that it is still identifiable to look at his trajectory and, today, to see whether or not those political and religious trajectories that absorbed his followers fulfilled his last articulated aims. I would make the case that they have not, and I would further argue that a serious strand of thought from Malcolm, particularly as an epistemological method for political and religious formation, is derivable from his speeches, his organizational formations, his specific action items, and the further imagining of his growing edges, as well as the history he represented—religiously, philosophically, and politically.

This is because traditions or schools of thought are not necessarily derived immediately from laid-out methods by their founders. Rather, they are the developed

¹⁸ Decaro, 220.

traditions of certain thoughts—at times simple in their original formations, but whose applied reason receives more robust treatment so they can be reapplied to burgeoning situations¹⁹.

This is certainly the case with the Islamic tradition, whose knowledge production was developed by responding to inquiries and challenges internal and external to it.²⁰ The codified schools of Islamic law were derivative of received methods prior to them, and it was the followers of the eponymous Islamic religious schools who codified the school and determined whether it remained for posterity.²¹

The components I extract from Malcolm will bring forth an abstracted constitutive set of sources for what should be seen as the bases of a *Malcolmian dialectic approach*. This dialectical approach has a comprehensive form that is at once ethical, refutational, synthetic, and a metaphysical/contemplative reading of reality.

Why Dialectics?

History is filled with events which rhyme. To borrow from Hegel there is a thesis, an antithesis and a synthesis²². The relationship between Black and white people serves as a prime example of this dynamic. Black folk and White folk are a great example of that.

¹⁹ Martin Nguyen, *Modern Muslim Theology* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 55.

²⁰ Nguyen, *Modern Muslim Theology*, 55.

²¹ Nguyen, 60.

²² Julie E. Maybee, "Hegel's Dialectics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2020 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/hegel-dialectics/>.

Black folks existed as the primary contradictions to one another on the African continent, often on a tribal basis, yet when sold or abducted into the Americas we become one synthesized black body, often obscure to itself, not materially obscure to the intentions of capitalist machination.²³ Something similar occurs in the formation of white identity in the Americas, but it would be that it would not be the identity of the slave, but at the lowest level the wage laborer. Whiteness would also be the elite's exclusive identity, to which no other racial category would belong, rare exceptions aside.²⁴

In the new world the contradiction would be black vs white, and the more opportunities for blacks to engage in their own synthetic process through the freedom of resistance and marronage the more robust their struggles became. The first insurrection of the enslaved in the western Hemisphere, would be conducted by senegambian Muslims in St domingo ,modern Haiti, on the plantation of the grandson of Columbus, this history would reappear in the revolt of Makandal, a Muslim, and would burst forth in the Moment of what would be the haitian revolution, initiated by Dutty Bukman a Senegambian Muslim who would fulfill the work of his predecessors²⁵. This pattern reappears in Malcolm, a black Muslim revolutionist, and those whom he raised a resistant consciousness for. The conscious awareness of this pattern is seemingly recognized by those historically analogous to columbus. Cointelpro's mission to stop the rise of a black

²³ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), ?.

²⁴ Robinson, ?.

²⁵ Robinson, 166-72.

messiah, though metaphorical seems all too well to imply another metaphysical and dialectical reading of history, though it be sinister.²⁶

Though black and white would serve as a contradiction it would also coalesce, and produce its own synthesis. Of course, so many of us are of mixed racial ancestry but are of one racial category for the sake of social control. One could not claim both to be Negro and white in America, as black blood was a sully, as Muslim blood would be sully in Reconquista Spain; a sufficient reason to justify one's death.²⁷

This coalescing would not just be in the procreative sense, but in the rebellious one in which blacks and white would express class solidarity across racial lines against their common oppressor. Bacon's rebellion in the late 17th century, which was the first instance of this, would find its analogies in various ways. It would be in the actions of white abolitionists in the centuries after, and it would find form in the 60s in those multi-racial coalitions formed by the panther party against capitalist exploitation, such as Fred Hampton's rainbow coalition. It must also be noted that the panthers in general and Fred Hampton in particular were self-acclaimed ideological students of Malcolm though they operated from a marxian framework.²⁸

It is also significant to note that after these moments of rebellion the social-racial stratification was reinforced. Stricter racialized laws were enforced after Bacon's rebellion were put into place and one could cite a whole consortium of historic anti

²⁶ Daulatzai, 111.

²⁷ Robinson, 3-4.

²⁸ Daulatzai, 19.

miscegenation laws²⁹. This reinforced stratification or other manipulative policies soft are hard was to shape the discourse as the hegemony of white supremacy always had, through an exploitative media imaging of the black person through exploitative caricature in entertainment, hyper criminalization in news media, and overrepresentation in the prison system unjustly etc.³⁰

It is clear that this stratification, obfuscation, and manipulation of the terms of reality is to prevent the wretched of the earth from engaging in a dialectical process of natural self transformation, intuitively achieved by anyone seeking good. It is not our purpose to discover all the means that constructed this reality, however it is to know that it happened through an analysis, and that it was proposed, enforced, socially actualized, and is effective at the moment of my typing.

We should know though that though this history of exploitation under the epoch of global white supremacy is dialectical in form it is surely nothing other than sophistry. It was given verification through a power of the type that Huey Newton described, for it was a defined phenomenon that was made to act in a certain way by political and economic coercion, though it did not have a basis in truth.³¹ Such as the one drop rule

²⁹ F. James Davis, "Mixed Race America - Who Is Black? One Nation's," Frontline, *PBS.org*, reprinted from his book *Who is Black? One Nation's Definition* (Penn State University Press, 1991), <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jefferson/mixed/onedrop.html>.

³⁰ Daulatzai, 13.

³¹ As Newton stated in a 1968 interview, "To us power is, first of all, the ability to define phenomena, and secondly the ability to make these phenomena act in a desired manner." MerriCatherine, "Huey P. Newton's Interview with the *Movement Magazine* (1968)," *Medium*, January 13, 2018, <https://medium.com/@merricatherine/huey-p-newtons-interview-with-the-movement-magazine-1968-a328e6b78c32>.

which made a person a negro if they had any black lineage.³² If a proposition has known verification for its veracity other than authority it could only be circular, sophistical, and anti-christic in its capacities of inversion.

The question must be asked how many more years and lives must be consumed in the crucible of time before the wretched of the earth learn how to win. Must so many die for us to learn, and must so many of us die in order to win. Or is there a means by which we adjust ourselves and our thinking in order to optimize our collective wellbeing as inhabitants of the earth.

Martin Nguyen draws attention to the need for an articulation of contemporary Islamic theology. This theology is not merely dialectical in terms of debating differing dogmas but involves the entirety of theological practice³³. I would nuance this by stating that all practice must be understood as dialectical, as it is contestable, negotiated, and struggles for expression. This does not mean there is no moment of mimesis or transmission, where individuals or collectives are receptive to authority or dispositionally obedient to divine command. Dialectics must begin with something agreed upon and have a foundation.³⁴ It is to say that all aspects of what is dialectical should be allowed to unfold as such. Dialectics uncovers truth and arrives at new intellectual and ethical locations through sound reasoning. This is the ethical disposition through which I view Malcolm, as a dialectician of the Black radical tradition and the first dialectician of the Islamic religion in America.

³² James Davis, "Mixed Race America - Who Is Black?"

³³ Nguyen, 20.

³⁴ Roland Hall "Dialectic," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 2, edited by Paul Edwards, (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 52

Traditionalism, The Black Radical Tradition, Neo-traditionalism, and Malcolm as a Tradition

Intellectually and politically, neo-traditionalism, as identified by Wala Quisay, has solidified its position as the predominant framework among Western Muslims, while alternative approaches have either failed to gain communal acceptance or have been deemed insufficient in addressing the unique challenges of Muslims in the American or Western context.³⁵

My central assertion here is that, at the highest intellectual echelons, neo-traditionalism has come to represent what is considered authentic Islamic thought within the Western Hemisphere. However, neotraditionalism is subject to a number of internal challenges, and developments which may cause its reformation and realignment as a general intellectual and social project.

Neo-traditionalism, in my reading, in my reading as it is formulated in the west emerges from philosophical traditionalism, or shares overlapping intellectual roots with it³⁶. Traditionalism is the philosophy that holds that there is a unifying truth or shared wisdom behind all major world religions³⁷. Along with this key notion is the counter

³⁵ Wala Quisay, *Neo-Traditionalism in Islam in the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 24.

³⁶ Quisay, 150-3

³⁷ Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 24.

modernist position that the world is in decline, not progress.³⁸ Its founding thinkers were of different religious inclinations, but a number practiced or settled on Islam as a faith, such as Rene Guenon, its arguably most important one. Similar to the Black Radical Tradition, is the context from which *white Islam* emerges. By *white Islam*, I do not mean all white Muslims, as many white muslims have emerged from the engagement as leftist with the black radical tradition. It can be that some may emerge from both simultaneously to the extent to which they are informed by both phenomenon and literature. White Islam here can refer to a set of thinking of Islam that seeks to reconcile the Western (or white) past and present identity with that of the Islamic and Oriental. Stated more clearly, those early religious formations of white Muslims occupying varying beliefs—who were associated with traditionalism—can be seen as analogous to the development of Islam among Black communities in the Nation of Islam and the Moorish Science Temple. This can certainly be seen as the case when one can identify the emergence of both phenomena deriving their early form from secret societies and mystery schools.³⁹

As a broader philosophical trend, neo-traditionalism, also known as perennialism, grows out of the Orientalist context⁴⁰. It was a contradiction within Orientalist thought as it expressed less of an explicitly dominating narrative in relation to the colonial subject, but rather one of borrowing and universalizing the truths of these traditional civilizations—now conquered. It was a sort of intellectual "going native." René Guénon certainly did

³⁸ Sedgwick, 25.

³⁹ Sedgwick, 16.

⁴⁰ Sedgwick, 16.

that, living his last years in Egypt as a practicing member of the Islamic faith and locally married.

Traditionalism did not emphasize the savage, but the saint. However, one must ask: Are traditional peoples traditionalist? Meaning, do they relate to the world as the traditionalist does? Largely, they do not, because the privileged character of the traditionalist—by class, geography, lineage, and race—historically and even now, leads to a whole set of different embodied experiences by which the world and theological truths are interpreted differently. This is most certainly the case with philosophical traditionalism and its Islamic adherents. Their polemical exchanges with the broader Muslim community show that the traditionalist narrative around the universality of all spiritual traditions would often not hold and would come to be considered heretical.⁴¹

Thus, traditionalism in Islamic thought—among those who deem themselves part of the larger orthodox community—would not become a theology, but rather an aesthetic, a cultural backdrop, a reading of history, and at times, a politic. Yet, despite traditionalism’s meaningful connections being established between Western and Islamic civilizations through this intellectual discourse, it has repeatedly presented problems—whether essential or incidental—which may not be fully known until further dialectical engagement occurs.

As mentioned before, Islam—particularly in America—emerges out of the Black Radical Tradition. This black radical tradition began with the first acts of resistance of

⁴¹ Salman Younas, “Can Truth Be Found in Every Religion?” *SeekersGuidance*, April 13, 2016, <https://seekersguidance.org/answers/islamic-belief/can-truth-be-found-in-every-religion/>.

enslaved blacks in the western hemisphere. This tradition was motivated at its outset by the Islamic cosmology and ethical system which lamented successful rebellion in Haiti and Bahia, Brazil.⁴² The black radical tradition is defined by its coiner Cedric Robinson as : “the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality.”⁴³

This gave Islamic discourse a particularly liberatory character. For many, even non muslim, Islam represented certain qualities: peace, justice, equality, resistance, etc. However, due to several factors—such as the influx of immigrant Muslims who became middle- and upper-class citizens, 9/11, the War on Terror, and the media portrayal of Muslims—the image of Islam, once primarily associated with figures like Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, shifted.⁴⁴

It is here that neo-traditionalism, though not alone, but as the assumed highest point of Islamic discourse and cultural presentation, stepped in, further weakening these past associations. This gave indirect intellectual substance to some of the worst positions of American Muslim bourgeoisie, leaving this element of the Muslim community socially and politically impotent, and the larger community disassociative. One can cite neo-traditionalist responses in the post-9/11 moment, the Black Lives Matter movement, the

⁴² Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 9.

⁴³ Robinson, 172.

⁴⁴ Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 16.

George Floyd moment, and responses to Palestinian and Syrian struggles to observe these patterns.⁴⁵

Neo-traditionalism in the broadest sense, may simply refer to the contemporary followers of the Islamic tradition in the contemporary period, so this is not to say that all neo-traditionalist thinkers come to the same conclusions or politics, or that unstated figures views are not subject to change or nuance. However, it is to cite a trend that, intellectually, socially, and politically, has been identified numerous times as prone to elitism, quietism, racism, and internationally, compradorism.⁴⁶ One can see the contrast here between the philosophical telos of the black radical tradition and traditionalism from which neo traditionalism emerges. The Black radical tradition describes a phenomenon that is in the midst of a tenuous self actualizing survival, and its total productive efforts reflect that, while the other is the post facto universalization of those belonging to the colonizer class, seeking an expanded view from the previous myopia of the initiative colonial moment.

My intention here is not to specify specific contemporary figures who may represent this trend or to cite all of the political alignments that shape this expression, but rather to encourage a dialectical shift. Culture, context, and aesthetics are determining aspects of Islamic thought, and it is my strongest belief that the traditionalist, neo traditionalist, dialectical and intellectual exchange is insufficient in taking account of the world and solving its problems. Its intellectual contributions constituted a number of

⁴⁵ Quisay, 141-145.

⁴⁶ Quisay, 196-199

profound reflections and developments: literature, institutions, expanded imaginations etc. However for Islamic intellectualism, ie neo-traditionalism to be intellectually sound it needs to be brought back into a thoroughly dialectical engagement with the black radical tradition, born from the perspective of reality wholly missed by the upper class intellectualism, endemic to the current construction of neo-traditionalism.

This is where Malcolm X , as a tradition, becomes extremely relevant, not just for what he did but for whom he was connected to and the larger tradition he represented. He, too, was an American in terms of geography and nationality, although he did not care to use the term. Yet, as a so-called American Negroe, in his dialectical engagements, he challenged the mainstream American definitions of "good" and dominant propagandized accounts of truth. In this counterposition he took that challenged the dominant narrative, he reshaped the world and America. Of course his journey was imperfect, filled with pivots, but as a totality he brings together, in a communal fashion, worlds that would have otherwise collided. This significant dialectical positioning he took was subversive but not obscure, convincing but not of the status quo, militant but universal in its compassion. His bravery was more benefit than feigned weakness, and his sacrifices, the most ultimate being his life created space for all peoples to get a more genuine picture of the world, that under other hushed, moderate, or afraid discourses, would have never been unveiled.

As said earlier Malcolm as a tradition has not had a thorough exposition and reproduction, and this is because of often not knowing where to place him. Not knowing where to place him is a result of not knowing that he represented a prior tradition, and that his development was guided by a development of that tradition in his context. This

tradition was the Black radical tradition, but in particular the variant of its expression that was deeply Muslim.

Intellectual traditions should not be so poorly conceived that they require a fully expressed thesis to identify them in order to engage with them and extract from them robustly.

Kwame Nkrumah, in his work *Consciencism*, states about tradition:

When I say that in every society there is at least one ideology, I do not thereby mean that in every society a fully articulated set of statements is to be found. In fact, it is not ideology alone which can be so pervasive and at the same time largely covert... In every society, there is to be found a morality; this hardly means that there is an explicit set of statements defining the morality. A morality is a network of principles and rules for the guidance and appraisal of conduct. And upon these rules and principles, we constantly fall back. It is they which give support... We share within the same society a body of moral principles and rules garnered from our own experience and that of our forebears. The principles directing these experiences give us skill in forming moral opinions without our having to be articulate about the sources of the judgments.⁴⁷

Malcolm to state it shortly, was a link in the continuity of the black radical tradition, and he was that traditions component which brings forth its Islamic contour into full view.

The synthesis of the black the radical and the Muslim may be difficult for some to conceive of, because phenomenally they are often conceived of and practiced in contradiction to each other. Yet we can do the skillful work of reweaving them together and understanding their genealogical roots. Malcolm represents the pinnacle of the confluence of the black the radical and the muslim and he simultaneously holds a place of

⁴⁷ Nkrumah, 56-60.

significance in each category separately. A Malcolmian dialectical method requires this historical and ontological understanding, as it becomes a means to not only analyze and contemplate but to act.

CHAPTER 3.

A MALCOLMIAN DIALECTICAL APPROACH CONSTRUCTED FROM INTERSECTING TRADITIONS

In this last portion I will seek to give an account of what I intend by a Malcomian dialectical approach, one that I think is representative of the principled and political aims Malcolm sought but whose thought is further developed and given a more justifiable islamic character, as well as a rootedness in the continuity of the Islamic and Black radical Tradition. Malcolm as a figure needs little justification but when it comes to seeking to give his thought some canonical meaning in the Islamic tradition then an argument must be made. Articulating this in a replicable way also should serve to make a Malcolman political thought and identity more replicable. This is an attempt to lay foundations for this project as a further pursuit but surely can't be seen as exhaustive. The two primary sources of this dialectical method are the Islamic and Black radical tradition, this is because in my reading Malcolm is a late iteration of the black radical tradition, one with clear convergence with the Islamic tradition. In so far as I speak about one or the other without reference to Malcolm or each other then their continuity should be kept in mind by the overall narrative of this writing, and when I can I will attempt to tie it to some notion that Malcolm clearly expressed in his life.

It was in prison where he not only engaged in rehab and spiritual seclusion, but he honed his skills in debate: on matters political, religious, and otherwise. He would go on

say : “One of the first things, I think, young people, especially nowadays, should learn how to do is: see for yourself and listen for yourself and think for yourself.”¹

Malcolm was an individual who brought himself through extremely different and even at odds forms of self through this ethic of dialectical discovery. This ethic finds itself in the likes of al-Ghazali, who had to go on his journey towards the seeking of certainty, after life as a scholar, who had come to suffer an intellectual existential crisis. One of the foremost shapers of orthodoxy would state in his writings:

If writing these words yields no other outcome save to make you doubt your inherited beliefs, compelling you to inquire, then it is worth it—leave alone profiting you. Doubt transports [you] to the truth. Who does not doubt fails to inquire. Who does not inquire fails to gain insight. Without insight, you remain blind and perplexed. So we seek God’s protection from such an outcome.”²

and

There is no hope of returning to unquestioned belief after leaving it because a condition of the uncritical follower is that he does not realize that he is being uncritical. For once he realizes that, then the glass of his unquestioned belief is shattered. The fragments cannot be mended; they cannot be pieced back together and remade. It must be melted in the fire and made anew into another form altogether.”³

There are multiple notions of dialectics from which we intend to construct a Malcolmian dialectics. One is metaphysical and the other is dialogical, or in another

¹ Malcolm X, “Malcolm X Talks to Young People,” reprinted in Malcolm-X, <https://themaalcolmX.wordpress.com/malcolm-x-quotes/malcolm-x-talks-to-young-people/>.

² Nguyen,121. Full citation needed.

³ Nguyen,119.

sense one is epistemological while the other is methodological. To say that the world proceeds from processes that appear to be dialectical is a proposition about the substance of the world, whereas proposing a method for dialectics is a proposed mode for engagement in or with the world. The dialogical aspect of dialectics can be divided into the refutational and the synthetic.

In the West, formal dialectics finds its origin in the pre-Socratics and develops a more refined pedagogy with Plato and Aristotle. It has come to be known as the following: The method of refutation is by examining logical consequences.

1. Sophistical reasoning, which uses rhetorical tricks to mislead or confuse.
2. The method of division involves the repeated logical analysis of genera into species.
3. An investigation of supremely general abstract notions through reasoning, starting from specific cases or hypotheses.
4. Logical reasoning or debate that uses premises that are merely probable or generally accepted.
5. Formal logic, involving structured rules for logical reasoning.
6. The criticism of the logic of illusion, exposing contradictions that arise when reason attempts to go beyond experience to address transcendental objects.
7. The logical development of thought or reality through thesis, antithesis, and synthesis to reconcile opposing ideas.⁴

⁴ Hall, 52. Full citation needed.

There is a serious question as to whether logic and dialectic—which is a type of applied logic between two interlocutors—actually advance knowledge. This hinges on definitions and categorizations of knowledge, as well as questions of certainty.⁵ To this, I answer in the affirmative, as dialectic clarifies logical relations and unveils the ambiguity of terms. However, when a discussion between two interlocutors forces one side to be declared the victor and the other the loser, it inevitably limits the scope of knowledge.⁶ It was in response to this question of the advancement of knowledge that Hegel formulated another dialectical scheme—one that produced new knowledge through the opposition of thesis and antithesis, culminating in synthesis.⁷

Metaphysical Dialectics

In so far as the Metaphysical is concerned the dialectical process that we proffer metaphysically derives its transmitted truths from Islam. This is justified of course, because Malcolm was Muslim. The Islamic epistemological scheme holds three foundational judgements as being sound for knowledge production: the scriptural, the rational, and the empirical.⁸ This can be said to cover all knowledge and to not deny any type of knowledge at face value, like the divide between materialism and idealism or

⁵ Hall, 52.

⁶ Hall, 52.

⁷ Maybee, *Hegel's Dialectics*. Full citation needed.

⁸Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Johor Bahru, Johor Darul Ta'zim: Penerbit UTM Press, 2014), 1-7.

secular vs religious knowledge. Materialism limits its metaphysics to the measurable, whereas an idealism may state that what's measured is not truly real⁹. A secular approach would not incorporate or take for granted into its worldview truths that could only find its place coming from a revealed scripture that is affirmed as true.

The rational judgements align with the rules of logic that are regulated by the first principles which are believed to hold over in ontology as well.¹⁰ Such as belief in the principle of identity and non contradiction. The affirmation of an empirical event is the acknowledgement of a cosmological pattern experienced through some account of the senses.¹¹ It is of course the case that phenomena are argued for by a synthesis of the judgements accepted in a framework.

Insofar as dialectics refers to a philosophical reading of history it is essential that one refers back to Hegel. Hegelian thought falls under the rubric of idealism, which takes as its primary subject mind or spirit rather than matter.¹²Hegel's dialectic in history situates the development of spirit in time as the teleological factor. ¹³His metaphysics was of the panentheistic type, imagining the universe as having a unity of being, where the absolute mind manifests in the particular minds of people.¹⁴ He does not wholly reject

⁹ Maybee, *Hegel's Dialectics*.

¹⁰Karim Lahham. "The Anatomy of Knowledge & the Ontological Necessity of First Principles." Tabah Research, Dec. 31, 2020, xii, <https://www.tabahresearch.org/publications/the-anatomy-of-knowledge-the-ontological-necessity-of-first-principles>.

¹¹ Attas, 1-7. Full citation needed.

¹² Maybee.

¹³ Maybee.

¹⁴ Maybee.

matter, in my estimation, but rather sees it as a manifestation of the primary idea of spirit. Furthermore, his reading of history situates the development of absolute spirit in cultures as the actualization of God in particular subjects. Later scholars interpret him with variance—some reading his thought as a progressive social and political philosophy, while others see it as a metaphysical justification for the tyranny of the state.¹⁵

Marx, of course, totally rejects idealism¹⁶. He takes from Hegel a dialectical reading of history but inverts the metaphysics, giving reality only to matter¹⁷. Unlike Hegel, he rejects any notion of God and dismisses religion entirely. In his dialectical reading of history, causality and telos are not determined by divine will, but by the preponderance of material conditions¹⁸. Engels clarifies after Marx's death that while they did not seek to deny the effect of ideas, their primary objective was to emphasize the economic principle in history as the decisive one.

¹⁹Marx also rejects the reconciliation of idealism with materialism, though later Marxist-oriented thinkers have sought to bridge the two. Both the Hegelian and Marxist dialectics have set teleological and eschatological conclusions: for Hegel, it is the progression and actualization of absolute spirit in time; for Marx, it is the communist

¹⁵ Maybee.

¹⁶ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, s.v. "Dialectical Materialism," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, last modified January 24, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dialectical-materialism>.

¹⁷ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, s.v. "Dialectical Materialism."

¹⁸ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, s.v. "Dialectical Materialism."

¹⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker, (New York: Norton, 1978).760-9

achievement of humanity. The underlying metaphysical position substantially and eschatological of both thinkers, while useful, appears limited. The limitation in my estimation is in the fact that the terms of either dialectical scheme will likely preclude or deemphasize some aspect of reality. It also is the case that in this progressive eschatology, a modernist outlook that gives undue justifications to the actions of the present, just because an event's time in place is presumably fulfilling.

From the experience of the Islamic or Black radical tradition, modernity does not necessarily represent progress, or fulfilment of any ideal. It was ibn Khaldun's suggestion that the events of time were elliptical, and the western historian Arnold Toynbee seconded him.²⁰ A cyclical Metaphysical reading of time surely sit in the convergence of the black radical tradition in its islamic Expressions when we see that it was the night of power in the Month of Ramadan from whence the enslaved revolt of Bahia was planned, which would be thought to be the means of its success.²¹

If we examine the last hundred years, the trajectory of history for the Black Diaspora and the Muslim world appears more elliptical than linear. Moments of robust resistance and liberation have arisen throughout modernity and colonialism, only to wane again. Mass conversions to Islam occurred during the colonial and neo colonial era in ways they had not before in Africa, as a reaction to the intrusion of the colonial powers,

²⁰ Robert Irwin, "Toynbee and Ibn Khaldun," *Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 3 (1997): 461–479, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283888>.

²¹ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 9. Full citation.

and even the inadvertent connectivity that it provided the colonized.²² There is of course from the Islamic scriptural sources notions of renewal every century, and millenarian beliefs that the later generation of the Muslim community would be amongst its best, after periods of decadence and the aforementioned renewal²³. This is all to state that an intelligent metaphysical view of the world that can see the unfolding of processes from the interaction of things, has its own indicators of historical patterns.

The view that I'm proposing here which stretches back to the Islamic tradition and can be read within the black radical tradition, certainly Maps onto Malcolms own reading of history, about which he said was the discipline that most rewarded our research.²⁴ His notion of chickens coming home to roost was a theological and metaphysical statement about cyclical patterns of cosmic justice in creation.²⁵

Formal Dialectics

The Islamic tradition developed its form of dialectics which took on a number of names, such as *jadl*, *khilaf*, and its most famous and latest iteration could be identified as “*adab al bahth wa-lmunazarah*(The ethics of investigation and inquiry). This format

²² David Motadel, ed., *Islam and the European Empires*, The Past & Present Book Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 25.

²³ *Sunan Abi Dawud* 4291, “Hadith on Tajdid: Righteous People Will Renew the Religion,” reprinted in Daily Hadith Online, September 9, 2012, <https://www.abuaminaelias.com/dailyhadithonline/2012/09/09/tajdid-deen-every-century/>.

²⁴ Patricia Reid, “Why Become a Historian?” *American Historical Association*, January 1, 1996, <https://www.historians.org/resource/why-become-a-historian-patricia-reid/>.

²⁵ Albert Bender, “Chickens Coming Home to Roost: Remember What Malcolm Said,” *People’s World*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/chickens-coming-home-to-roost-remember-what-malcolm-said/>.

essentially laid out the grounds for what constituted ethical debate.²⁶ This was a tradition that was indigenous to the Muslim tradition before the reception of Hellenistic literature, but it would mirror it and take from it as its later iterations was an account of the developments of the whole Islamic tradition to that point. Its form as articulated by Taskoubre Zadeh was for the purposes of refutation²⁷. However, this does not preclude the synthesis of Knowledge in Islamic history, as this science itself is a result of a synthetic process.²⁸ A great prophetic axiom of the Islamic tradition is that “wisdom is the lost property of the believer and he is most entitled to it wherever he finds it.” Malcolm was known for taking the best of knowledge wherever he found it and used it for his dialectical purposes to advance the cause of black people under his organization for the majority of his career, the Nation of Islam.²⁹ It was at this point where he engaged most in refutation, but once he left his explicit emphasis would not be refutation but synthesis. He would say at the Oxford Union: “I, for one, will join in with anyone – I don’t care what color you are – as long as you want to change this miserable condition that exists on this earth.” This was a distinctly different attitude from what he proposed prior to, and he set up the platforms to do so.

²⁶ Taskopruzade Zadeh, *A Treatise on Disputation and Argument*, trans. Safaruk Z. Chowdhury (London: Dar al- Nicosia, 2020), 48.

²⁷ Zadeh, *A Treatise on Disputation and Argument*, 48.

²⁸ Zadeh, 13.

²⁹ DeCaro, 90. Full citation needed.

Insofar as it is useful to talk about a dialectical scheme that is particularly Malcolmian, it is not so much the form as refutational or synthetic that would determine it, though these are components, as much as it would be about what the terms that are being argued for.

At the founding rally of the Organization of African American Unity, Malcolm stated: “ We declare our right on this earth...to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary”

This sentiment is one that has been established but its means have seemingly been lost by the black American and Muslim American community. In the words of Malcolm the means to this achievement is not just ideological but material as, “Power never {only} takes a step back, only in the face of power.”

The terms upon which Malcolm was arguing for were justice, equality, and he was arguing for the means of power to achieve them. Not only did he argue for them but he set up platforms by which they could be achieved. It was now the case that Malcolm would openly take a position on Blacks organizing to vote, taking the means of self defense to secure those votes; while seeking the means to hold America accountable in the U.N, and looking forward to any political developments which would spell a revolutionary predicament in the future. ³⁰While these positions seemed

³⁰ Sales, 90.

counterpositional, they brought together people who would have at times had oppositional positions and ideologies under a common tent.

Malcolm and his organization the OAAU had the habit of teaching big tent black nationalism, on these terms, but its own organizational context was supposed to be able to be a platform for this collectivized expression as well as its external organizing. The Muslim mosque incorporated was his religious organization that was supposed to engage in the religiously oriented work. It was the case that the two would be distinct, and had a degree of separation but they two would have an ongoing synthetic relationship, of course due to being led by the same individual.

It was also interestingly the case that Malcolm's Muslim mosque incorporated would have a big tent orthodox framing, as it had no particularized religious ideology yet. Malcolm would make relationships all over the Muslim world, and would receive large amounts of scholarship from azhar and large amounts from Madinah university, two religious universities with opposed religious ideologies , though both are sunni.³¹

A Dialectical Platform for Organizational Purposes and Beyond

Now the question we arrive at are by what terms, in this developed Anglo Muslim logosphere could a Malcolmian dialectics be legitimately expressed today. During the life of MALcolm, he would not be directed by the Islamic traditions' structural dictates in its

³¹ Decaro, 220.

islamic sciences, or all the specifics of islamic Law. At that time the Islamic tradition had not spoken to the American context; it was the black radical tradition, and in the religious context black religion which motivated the religious expression.³² Certain forms of social organization and outlooks would come to be seen by some of the burgeoning Islamic community as impermissible imitation of non- Muslims or superfluous.³³ This tension of the expression of Islam in the western hemisphere has seen no shortage of and has caught the attention of no shortage of writers of different perspectives. However, from those who are practitioners of Islam the question is not as much whether or not Islam fits in the west, following some Huntingtonian clash of civilizations thesis, rather it is to seek an Islamic expression that adequately speaks to the contemporary identity and context of the American Islamic community. It is the quest for an adequate theological expression that answers the questions of the time which are sensible to what is perceived as common sense wisdoms of culture, and give answers to these questions in a eudemonistic way.

The tension here lies in the extent to which one determines how much proponents of a tradition speak on the traditions behalf or how much the tradition speaks on their behalf. This is further complicated when two traditions are brought to bear on a subject, and it is asked how much of either. Islam as a faith tradition, has a totalizing character in that it determines what is normative and prescriptive, however it has never been the case that Islam was not situated in or dependent upon a particular cultural expression.³⁴

³² Jackson, *Islam and the black American*, 13.

³³ Jackson, *Islam and the black American*, 16.

³⁴ Abdallah, *Islam and the Cultural Imperative*, 1-7.

Dr Sherman Jackson, sought to work out this tension over a series of words beginning with “Islam and the blackAmerican” in which he first proposed that in order for black MUslim Americans to achieve a reconciliation in their cultural and contextual needs and ritualized religious mandates, a mastery or power mastery of the tradition needed to be achieved. He recanted this in his next work *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering* that held that black Americans simply needed a handle on the rhetoric of the Islamic tradition, so as to not be in an oblong juxtaposition culturally and religiously³⁵. In the shared use of religious language and meanings to address the contextual and cultural needs, one is not left too far from one's religious need while seeking to satisfy the needs of the cultural identity. Most recently this idea has expanded in his work the” *Islamic Secular*” which seeks to distinguish between Islam as a normative discourse on moral normativity, and the production of Islamic knowledge and cultural artifacts informed by a core Islamic ethic of God Consciousness. ³⁶Its main argument is to make room in Islamic discourse within the reasoned space of the legal tradition to Islam, to state that Islamic law although a broad discourse is a limited discourse, and in order for a vibrant knowledge production to take place that accommodates the needs of a society, this space must be acknowledged. ³⁷

Malcolmian dialectics, being that it had a secular platform in the OOAU, maps on well here. However those terms of equality, justice, and more have Islamic legal principles upon which it can draw strength. One can recall here the five aims of Islamic

³⁵ Jackson, *Islam and the Black American*, 16-20.

³⁶ Sherman A. Jackson, *The Islamic Secular* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 22.

³⁷ Jackson, *The Islamic Secular*, 22.

Law: the protection of life, religion, psyche, family, and property³⁸. A historical read of America through the black radical perspective will point one to the fact that the American project stripped black and indigenous people from the right to life, family, religious identity, psychological well being, and land. This historical reality continues till this day in subtle and explicit means. It is also the case from within the Islamic tradition that what is necessary to do in order to fulfill an obligation is in and of itself an obligation. In the events of growing white supremacy and fascism with a serious history of racism and Islamophobia, the growing capacity to be self-sufficient socio economically and politically , just to insure the statuses that Muslims deem religiously significant: such as freedom of religion and protection of cultural identity and expression. Considering that Muslims are a minority whose existence is coextensive with other minorities in America, it would also appear to follow that coalitional relationships with those Minorities in a Malcomian spirit could be argued to be necessary.

Lastly the most significant aspect of the Malcomian dialectic expression, and the synthetic one was expressed in his organizing approach. This approach would be exemplified in his org the OAAU which was intended as a type of inspired but also an inspired sister org of the OAU on the African continent. Malcolm deemed the supportive relationship between Africans on the continent and African Americans as necessary. The OAU was extremely diverse, perhaps more diverse than any continental political formation. It was Black, Arab, Muslim, and Christian, oddly bringing together an

³⁸ Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, "Living Islam with Purpose," Nawawi Foundation, 2007, <https://www.emaanlibrary.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Living-Islam-with-Purpose.pdf>, 2.

infusion of not just Pan Africanism but also Pan Arabism.³⁹ It was formed at a time in which many of the post colonial African leaders saw a unified Africa as necessary for the completion of the process of decolonization⁴⁰. The OAAU in combination with the Muslim mosque incorporated would mimic this dialectical diversity. The OAAU would practice bigtent black nationalism, which submerged ideological differences, but made use of them. The Muslim mosque incorporated in its Islamic spirit would not only carry out the religious tasks deemed important for Muslims it would also serve as a vehicle for international connectivity.

Malcolm was to present the constitution of this organization, the OAAU, on the day of his assassination. An excerpt from its constitution states:

“Pledging unity... Promoting justice... Transcending compromise... We, Afro-Americans, people who originated in Africa and now reside in America, speak out against the slavery and oppression inflicted upon us by this racist power structure. We offer to downtrodden Afro-American people courses of action that will conquer oppression, relieve suffering, and convert meaningless struggle into meaningful action.

1. The Organization of Afro-American Unity welcomes all persons of African origin to come together and dedicate their ideas, skills, and lives to free our people from oppression.

³⁹ R. Saad, “Reconciling Pan-Arabism and Pan-Africanism: The North African Leadership Dilemma,” *Leadership and Developing Societies* 3, no. 1 (2018): 1–32, <https://doi.org/10.47697/lids.3436100>.

⁴⁰ Saad, “Reconciling Pan-Arabism and Pan-Africanism,” 1-32.

2. The basic program of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, which is now being presented, can and will be modified by the membership, taking into consideration national, regional, and local conditions that require flexible treatment.
3. Each member will be encouraged to participate in the committee of his or her choice.
4. Understanding the differences that have been created amongst us by our oppressors in order to keep us divided, the Organization of Afro-American Unity strives to ignore or submerge these artificial divisions by focusing our activities and our loyalties upon our one goal: freedom from oppression.”

The program of the Organization of Afro-American Unity shall evolve from five strategic points deemed basic and fundamental to our grand alliance.

I. Restoration In order to enslave the African, it was necessary for our enslavers to completely sever our communications with the African continent and the Africans who remained there. In order to free ourselves from the oppression of our enslavers, it is absolutely necessary for the Afro-American to restore communications with Africa.

The Organization of Afro-American Unity will accomplish this goal by means of independent national and international newspapers, publishing ventures, personal contacts, and other available communications media. It will develop in the Afro-American people a keen awareness of our relationship with the world at large and clarify our roles, rights, and responsibilities as human beings.

We must change the thinking of the Afro-American by liberating our minds through the study of philosophies, psychologies, cultures, and languages that did not come from our racist oppressors. Provisions are being made for the study of languages such as Swahili, Hausa, and Arabic. These studies will give our people access to the ideas and history of mankind at large and thus increase our mental scope.

II. Reorientation In order to keep the Afro-American enslaved, it was necessary to limit our thinking to the shores of America—to prevent us from identifying our problems with the problems of other peoples of African origin. This made us consider ourselves an isolated minority without allies anywhere.

III. Education After enslaving us, the slave masters developed a racist educational system that justified to its posterity the evil deeds committed against the African people and their descendants.

We encourage Afro-Americans to establish experimental institutes and educational workshops, liberation schools, and child-care centers in the Afro-American communities.

We will influence the choice of textbooks and equipment used by our children in public schools while at the same time encouraging qualified Afro-Americans to write and publish the textbooks needed to liberate our minds. Until we completely control our own educational institutions, we must supplement the formal training of our children by educating them at home.

IV. Economic Security The Organization of Afro-American Unity will take measures to free our people from economic slavery. One way of accomplishing this will be to

maintain a technician pool—a bank of technicians. We must do this so that the newly independent nations of Africa can turn to us, their Afro-American brothers, for the technicians they will need now and in the future. By doing so, we will be developing an open market for the many skills we possess while simultaneously supplying Africa with the skills she can best use. This project will therefore be one of mutual cooperation and mutual benefit.

V. Self-Defense In order to enslave a people and keep them subjugated, their right to self-defense must be denied. They must be constantly terrorized, brutalized, and murdered. These tactics of suppression have been developed to a new high by vicious racists whom the United States government seems unwilling or incapable of dealing with in terms of the law of this land.

The Organization of Afro-American Unity, being aware of the increased violence against the Afro-American and of the open sanction of this violence and murder by police departments throughout this country and federal agencies, affirms our right and obligation to defend ourselves in order to survive as a people.

We encourage Afro-Americans to defend themselves against the wanton attacks of racist aggressors whose sole aim is to deny us the guarantees of the United Nations Charter of Human Rights and the Constitution of the United States.

The Organization of Afro-American Unity will take the necessary private steps to ensure the survival of the Afro-American people in the face of racist aggression and the defense of our women and children. We are within our rights to see to it that Afro-American people, who fulfill their obligations to the United States government (we pay taxes and

serve in the armed forces of this country like American citizens do), also exact from this government the obligations it owes us as a people—or exact these obligations ourselves. Needless to say, among these obligations, we include the protection of certain inalienable rights such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We Afro-Americans feel receptive toward all people of goodwill. We are not opposed to multiethnic associations in any walk of life. In fact, we have had experiences that enable us to understand how unfortunate it is that human beings have been set apart from each other because of so-called "racial" characteristics.

However, Afro-Americans did not create the prejudiced background and atmosphere in which we live. We must face the facts. A "racial" society does exist in stark reality, and not with equality for Black people. We who are nonwhite must meet the problems inherited from centuries of inequalities and deal with the present situations as rationally as we are able.

The exclusive ethnic quality of our unity is necessary for self-preservation.

Careful evaluation of recent experiences shows that "integration" actually describes the process by which a white society remains in a position to use, whenever and however it chooses, the best talents of nonwhite people. This power structure continues to build a society wherein the best contributions of Afro-Americans—and, in fact, of all nonwhite people—are either absorbed without acknowledgment or exploited to benefit a fortunate few while the masses of both white and nonwhite people remain unequal and unbenefited.

The time is past due for us to internationalize the problems of Afro-Americans. We have been too slow in recognizing the link between the fate of Africans and the fate of Afro-Americans. The civil rights bill is a similarly misleading and misinterpreted document of legislation. The premise of its design and application is not respectable in the eyes of those who recognize what personal freedom involves and entails.

The only document that is in order is a Declaration of Condemnation. And the only legislation worthy of consideration or endorsement by Afro-Americans—the victims of these tragic institutions—is a Proclamation of Restitution.

We must continue to internationalize our philosophies and contacts toward assuming full human rights....

Committees of the Organization of Afro-American Unity:

- The Cultural Committee
- The Economic Committee
- The Educational Committee
- The Political Committee
- The Publications Committee
- The Social Committee
- The Self-Defense Committee
- The Youth Committee⁴¹

⁴¹ "Malcolm X, et. al., "Program of the Organization of Afro-American Unity," reprinted in Malcolm-X.org, accessed March 21, 2025, https://www.malcolm-x.org/docs/gen_oaau.htm.

CONCLUSION

These are the words through which Malcolm, through a collective dialectic, advanced, and this is where he stopped. Thus, this is where I hold that we should begin again. It is not that in this that I am trying to advocate an ideology, rather it is to say that no conversation about the affairs of the world can be understood without understanding the active confluence between the historical phenomenon of the Islamic world tradition, the Black radical tradition, and the quest for justice under the oppression of colonial modernity. It is also to state that from this confluence great liberatory moments have been achieved. We find the most conscious expression of this confluence in Malcolm X and though he did not articulate a theory like Marx, he represents a rational method, with sound connections. There is without question that for the black radical tradition and the Islamic community in the western Hemisphere no figure has been produced in his semblance since. However, its replication is possible but it is up to the proponents of Malcolm and the traditions he represents to present his theory, praxis, and emerging edges with more rational and productive continuity.

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