

# "My Heart Is in Cairo": Malcolm X, the Arab Cold War, and the Making of Islamic Liberation Ethics

Edward E. Curtis, IV

When Malik El-Shabazz, as Malcolm X had come to be known, prepared to address the Young Men's Muslim Association in Cairo, Egypt, on July 27, 1964, he jotted down an outline of the speech in his travel diary. After attending the summit of the Organization of African Unity just days before, the former Nation of Islam minister and now head of the Muslim Mosque, Inc., in Harlem, New York, had stayed in Egypt to undergo training as a Muslim missionary. The speech in front of a Muslim audience in Egypt gave Shabazz an opportunity to cement his burgeoning partnership with the Egyptian government's Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, which was sponsoring his months-long residency in Egypt in 1964. The talk also offered a chance to seek the moral, political, and financial support of a foreign Muslim audience for the African American liberation struggle. The Egyptian president and Third World hero Gamal Abdel Nasser loomed large in the outline of the speech not only as a political revolutionary but also as an embodiment of Islamic ethics. Shabazz listed nine different points about Nasser:

1. Your President is my President
2. A Man: fearless, far-reaching (wise)
3. Uncompromising on the side of freedom
4. Supports (always) African Freedom Fighters

---

This is the author's manuscript of the work published in final form as:

Curtis, E. E., IV. (2015). "My Heart Is in Cairo": Malcolm X, the Arab Cold War, and the Making of Islamic Liberation Ethics. *Journal of American History*, 102(3), 775–798. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jav505>

5. Supports freedom everywhere
  1. Brought freedom to Egypt (Africa)
  2. returned The Suez to Africans
  3. Defeated the foreign invaders
  4. Good man, good Muslim—may God bless him<sup>1</sup>

Shabazz's comments were rhetorical gestures of praise and thanks tailored for his hosts and their leader, but they also revealed his thinking about how Nasser exemplified the religious and political identities to which Shabazz himself ascribed. The list alluded to Nasser's accomplishments and his status as a global leader of a nonaligned, pan-African, pro-Third World revolutionary politics, and concluded with an endorsement of Nasser as a good Muslim. In *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution* (1955), Nasser argued that Egypt's identity resided in three circles of influence: the Arab, the African, and the Islamic. Nasser sought to be a leader in all three spheres, though he emerged from the 1956 Suez crisis as a star of the Afro-Asian nonaligned movement, as well.<sup>2</sup>

This article, relying largely on underutilized correspondence and diaries from 1964, shows how Malik Shabazz constructed an Islamic ethics of liberation inspired by Nasser's example. This ethics was not a detailed political platform; it was a moral argument that the Muslim world had a religious obligation to fight for the freedom of all people of color, whether Muslim or not. The article builds on Manning Marable's suggestive assertion that toward the end of Shabazz's life (he was assassinated in early 1965), Islam became “the spiritual platform from which he constructed a politics of Third World revolution.” In Shabazz's thinking, however, Islam was more than a spiritual system—indeed, he spoke and wrote only a little about the sacred, the soul,

or other typically spiritual matters. For Shabazz, the heart of Islam, and of religion more generally, was ethics, which for him meant the ways human beings ought to behave not only in private and individual matters but also in public affairs, that is, in political life. This understanding of ethics was consonant with the Social Gospel tradition of American Christianity and more particularly with the prophetic tradition of African American religion that informed many twentieth-century African American religious movements.<sup>3</sup>

Shabazz's linking of Islam to the freedom of the so-called dark world also represented a continuation of a religious and political philosophy that he first articulated as a leader in Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam (NOI). Like many other African American radicals in the Cold War era, Shabazz reimagined the domestic civil rights movement as an international struggle for human rights and political self-determination. Many historians have shown how Shabazz sought alliances and argued for greater cooperation with government officials, activists, and intellectuals from Africa, the Middle East, and the Muslim world. Once formally separated from the NOI in early 1964, Shabazz continued to argue for the idea that Islam was, at its very core, a religious and political system of liberation from white oppression. Instead of citing the prophetic utterances of Elijah Muhammad as proof of Islam's revolutionary ethics, he began to appeal to other sources of religious authority, specifically the Sunni Islamic tradition, to argue that the liberation of socially, economically, and politically disfranchised Muslim and non-Muslim people, especially people of color in both the United States and abroad, was a moral obligation of all Muslims. Shabazz was not content to wait for the apocalypse to bring white supremacy to an end. Instead, he sought help from Africans, Muslims, and others to liberate African Americans as part of a broad, global struggle.<sup>4</sup>

Shabazz's Islamic ethics of liberation was thus a vital intervention in the racial politics of the Cold War. Looking past the bipolar Soviet-Union-versus-United-States struggle and the politics of African American liberalism, Shabazz identified nonaligned political allies as necessary to the struggle against white supremacy at home and abroad. This is why, as this article demonstrates, he needed to develop close ties with government officials and power brokers in the developing world who possessed the clout and the financial resources to wage a campaign on behalf of all people of color. As Shabazz's visits to newly independent sub-Saharan African states demonstrate, these players included Kenyan prime minister and subsequent president Jomo Kenyatta, Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah, and Ugandan prime minister Milton Obote. But just as important to Shabazz's goals were the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Republic (UAR), the name of the political union between Egypt and Syria that lasted from 1958 to 1961, and that Egypt continued to use throughout the 1960s even after Syria withdrew.

Shabazz spent five months abroad in 1964, mostly in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This article shows how Shabazz embraced, challenged, adapted, and negotiated the ideas and state-sponsored institutions that he encountered during this period. As part of their public diplomacy, Saudi and Egyptian missionaries, religious functionaries, and government officials sought to make Shabazz an American ally. His dairies and correspondence from this period illustrate that Shabazz was highly strategic in his dealings with them. Declaring at one point that "my heart is in Cairo," Shabazz identified Nasserism as a form of Islam that tied religion to revolution. But Shabazz also pursued the financial support and religious imprimatur of the anti-Nasserite and Saudi-funded Muslim World League. Shabazz desired this support to buoy the culture of Islamic learning, knowledge of the Islamic rituals, the study of the Qur'an, and other pietistic practices among his African American Muslim followers. Though he thought the Saudis too conservative and viewed

their sometime allies, the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, as tone deaf to antiblack racism, Shabazz identified in their Islamic missionary activities and their emphasis on the need for a genuine religious revival the potential to ignite political action.<sup>5</sup>

## **The Nation of Islam: Malcolm X's Road to Cairo**

To understand how Shabazz came to embrace an Islamic ethics of liberation closely aligned with the vision of Gamal Abdel Nasser, it is necessary to trace the formation of his religious and political consciousness in the Nation of Islam. The Nation of Islam was no detour on Shabazz's road to Cairo; it was where Shabazz first linked black liberation to Islamic religion. Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam played a significant role in the long history of American—particularly African American—cultural, religious, and political engagements with the Middle East and Islam, but it was not the first African American movement to interpret Islamic religion as a transnational and diasporic English-speaking black international freedom discourse. The idea had already been established by intellectuals such as Edward Wilmot Blyden, the author of *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race* (1887), and Duseé Mohamed Ali, the editor of the *African Times and Orient Review* and later foreign affairs columnist for the Universal Negro Improvement Association's *Negro World* newspaper after World War I. In the 1920s, a decade when African Americans institutionalized a variety of Muslim religious congregations and other voluntary associations, especially in the Midwest and on the East Coast, a common thread that linked groups popular in places such as Chicago, Detroit, Newark, New York, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis was the idea that Islamic religion—often in contradistinction to Christianity—nurtured black political self-determination or at least racial equality. This belief was held by all Islamic groups popular among African American Muslims, including the Moorish Science Temple of

America, the Ahmadiyya movement, and the black Sunni Muslim congregations associated with the leadership of the Sudanese missionary Satti Majid.<sup>6</sup>

The Nation of Islam, founded in 1930 as the Temple of Islam in Greater Detroit, was only one of the many different Muslim groups established in the interwar period, but it emerged after World War II as the largest single African American Muslim organization and, by the late 1950s, arguably the most prominent Muslim organization in the United States. In postwar America, the NOI provided, as the historian Penny Von Eschen puts it, “a space—for the most part unthinkable in the Cold War era—for an anti-American critique of the Cold War.” The organization tied the struggle for black dignity, freedom, and self-determination in the United States to the struggles of all people of color, the so-called dark world. In its rejection of Christianity, racial integration, and other components of liberalism, the Nation of Islam became a radical symbol of anti-Americanism. For Malik Shabazz, who served as minister of the Nation of Islam's Temple No. 7 in Harlem in the 1950s, the nonaligned movement of Third World countries against both Soviet and U.S. interference in their foreign and domestic policies became a sign of a changing political wind. “O, dark nations, of the East, know this,” he proclaimed in a sermon from 1955 or early 1956, “there are over seventeen million of us here in America who are being awakened by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. Though we have long been as ‘dead,’ we know today that we are your long lost brothers.”<sup>7</sup>

Shabazz saw the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, as a turning point in the history of colonized and formerly colonized people. Bringing together officials from twenty-nine different African and Asian countries, many of which had significant Muslim populations, Indonesian President Sukarno, the conference host, called for the unity of people of color in the

face of Cold War challenges to their political autonomy. The meeting attracted the attention of several prominent African American intellectuals, including the writer Richard Wright. Inspired by the call to arms, Shabazz drew out the radical elements of NOI religious doctrine and fused them with the revolutionary consciousness of postwar leaders in Africa and Asia. He positioned the organization as the U.S. vanguard of the global fight both to eschew colonial and neocolonial political control and to rid people of color of a colonized consciousness. In so doing, Shabazz identified Egypt's Nasser as a model of anticolonial, Afro-Asian Islamic leadership, and he was not the only African American leader to do so. Fellow Harlemite street orator Carlos Cooks called Nasser a “unique and rare personality,” both “African and Arabic.” Nasser became a hero to some African Americans, especially black Muslims in New York, in the wake of the 1956 take-over of the Suez Canal by Israeli, British, and French armed forces. Though it was U.S. president Dwight D. Eisenhower who demanded the withdrawal of these troops, people of color around the world saw Nasser as a victor and as potential leader of the global struggle against colonialism. In the context of the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 and 1956, Nasser's rhetoric and leadership struck many African Americans as a model of strength and persistence. Members of the NOI even hung pictures of him in their homes.<sup>8</sup>

In New York Shabazz developed an informal intellectual, social, and political network of Africans and African Americans, foreign and domestic Muslims, and other figures committed to the solidarity of the dark world. A pivotal member of this network was the Christian minister and Harlem congressman Adam Clayton Jr., who had attended the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung. When Powell invited Indonesian officials to visit Harlem in July 1957, Shabazz was on hand to greet them and praised Powell's support of the visit. “The 90 million Moslems in Indonesia,” Shabazz said at a public event with the visitors, “are only a small part of the 600

million more in other parts of the Dark World.” During this period, Shabazz also hosted various Muslim diplomats from the United Nations, including Syrian ambassador Rafik Asha and Egyptian attaché Ahmad Zaki al-Borai at a Temple No. 7 celebration.<sup>9</sup>

In 1958, the year when the United Arab Republic was formed and Nasser convened a meeting of the Afro-Asian Conference in Cairo, the Nation of Islam cabled Nasser to seek his support. In words that seem to be crafted by Malcolm X, the NOI urged Nasser to see their movements as branches of the same tree: “Freedom, justice, and equality for all Africans and Asians is of far-reaching importance, not only to you of the East, but also to over 17,000,000 of your long-lost brothers of African-Asian descent here in the West.” The symbolic link between the Nation of Islam and Nasser was so strong that it prompted Thurgood Marshall, counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and future U.S. Supreme Court justice, to denounce the movement in dramatic terms. Speaking at Princeton University, Marshall claimed that the Nation of Islam was “run by a bunch of thugs organized from prisons and jails, and financed, I am sure, by Nasser or some Arab group.” The association of a domestic black Muslim group with a foreign power, especially with Nasser or “some Arab group” was a serious threat to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Marshall also asserted.<sup>10</sup>

That same year, Shabazz's fame and his connections to a growing number of Africans and Muslims led to an invitation from Egyptian officials to visit the Middle East. Acting as Elijah Muhammad's emissary, Shabazz was to pave the way for his leader's visit to Egypt and Saudi Arabia. (Later that year, Elijah Muhammad performed an *'umra* [out-of-season pilgrimage] to Mecca and also visited Pakistan.) Ahmad Zaki al-Borai, the Egyptian representative to the United Nations, accompanied Shabazz to the airport on July 5, and once in Egypt, Shabazz met



with Anwar al-Sadat, Nasser's two-time vice president, and visited officials from Cairo's Al-Azhar University. It is unclear what was said during these meetings, but Shabazz later admitted to Pakistani American entrepreneur and Nation of Islam supporter Abdul Basit Naeem that when performing the prescribed prayers (*salat*), he was only able to mumble along and try to imitate what others were doing. From Cairo, where a case of diarrhea scuttled at least some of his planned activities, Shabazz briefly visited Khartoum, Sudan; Jerusalem; and Damascus, Syria; and finally, Jidda, Saudi Arabia.<sup>11</sup>

When he arrived back in New York later that month, Shabazz gave glowing reports to fellow Nation of Islam members and showed them films from his visit. He told them that “the Muslims in Egypt and Africa” were blacker than he was. His letters from both Jidda and Khartoum were also published in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the African American newspaper that first carried Elijah Muhammad's columns in the 1950s and often featured news about Africa and the Third World more generally. Writing for a domestic black American audience, Shabazz depicted the people of Arabia as racial brothers and sisters—their “facial appearance” and “regal black” and “rich brown” color would make them feel right “at home in Harlem,” he opined. Noting that “99 percent” of people in Jidda “would be jim-crowed in the United States,” he argued that the lack of color prejudice in Arabia was due to the Islamic principle of racial equality. While Christianity made the same rhetorical claims to racial equality, he wrote, in Islam countries it was an actual “way of life.”<sup>12</sup>

Shabazz's discussion of Arabs as people of color and his romantic view of racial harmony in the Arab world raises questions about his reasons for painting this rosy picture. Shabazz's positive framing of race in the Arab world was at least in part a response to widespread criticisms in the

African American press of Saudi Arabia, which did not outlaw slavery until 1962. But just as important to Shabazz's optimistic description of race in the Arab world was the important role that Sudan and Sudanese Muslims played in the formation of his views on the subject. In Sudan, Shabazz's host, the educator and Islamic activist Malik Badri, toured Shabazz around the cities of Khartoum and nearby Omdurman, where Shabazz encountered the Arabic-speaking black African culture about which Elijah Muhammad had been preaching, in a mythological register, for decades. Badri took Shabazz to schools and markets, and feted him as an honored guest in his brother's home. Sudan was an example for Shabazz of a country in which black, Muslim, and Arabic-speaking identities were complementary, not contradictory.<sup>13</sup>

During this 1959 trip, Shabazz also observed that many black Muslims had achieved a social status in the Arab world that was unimaginable in the United States at the time. One of his Egyptian hosts, Anwar Sadat, the son of a Sudanese mother, was—despite being ridiculed by fellow Egyptians as “Nasser's black poodle”—the vice president (and later president) of the country. By the 1960s, Shabazz publicly acknowledged the presence of antiblack racism in the Middle East, but he repeated pan-Islamist Abd al-Rahman Azzam's argument that “the problems of color which exist in the Muslim world exist only where, and to what extent that ... area of the Muslim world has been influenced by the West.” Whatever concerns Shabazz may have had about racial equality in the Arab world in the late 1950s and the 1960s were not going to interfere with his goal of linking the domestic struggle of African Americans to the Afro-Asian struggle against neocolonialism. It was too important to convince African Americans that their destinies lay not with the promises of Cold War black liberals but instead with their more natural black and brown allies in Africa and Asia.<sup>14</sup>

This vision was also, according to Shabazz, part of God's will. When Shabazz addressed Congressman Powell's Abyssinian Baptist Church in June 1963, he framed the black revolution as “part of God's divine plan,” arguing that God “will not rest until he has used his religion to establish one world—a universal, one-world brotherhood.” Shabazz's belief that the teleological goals of Islam were the same thing as the political goals of the black revolution was an expression of the Nation of Islam's understanding of religion and politics. Implicitly rejecting the secular notion that religion was a private, individual set of beliefs while politics was the public expression of communal and shared goals, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and other intellectuals in the organization interpreted Islam as both inherently religious and political. If religion did not contribute to the liberation of black people from racist oppression then it was not true religion but a part of the system of oppression. According to the Nation of Islam, true religion—the religion of Islam—was by definition a religion of liberation. Though Shabazz later rejected Elijah Muhammad's prophecy as a legitimate source of Islamic authority, the idea that Islamic religion required social and political action remained consistent.<sup>15</sup>

As Shabazz's celebrity (or, from the FBI's point of view, notoriety) grew in the late 1950s and early 1960s, increasing numbers of critics challenged his defense of Elijah Muhammad's doctrines. Rather than push those critics away, Shabazz developed close, if also contested relationships with some of them. “Long before Malcolm could come to Mecca,” writes the biographer Louis A. DeCaro Jr., “Mecca seemed to have come to Malcolm.” During this era, foreign and American-born Muslim students at U.S. universities were organizing campus ministries while Sunni Muslim-sponsored groups from the Middle East were beginning to develop *da'wa* (missionizing) as an organized activity in non-Muslim lands. All of these groups reached out to Shabazz, who was arguably the most articulate and powerful Muslim

spokesperson in the United States. Sunni Muslim students on American campuses and the representatives or allies of the missionary groups approached him as he toured college campuses. He also debated many Muslim critics of the Nation of Islam in New York City. Writing letters to the editor of newspapers such as the *Amsterdam News* and the *New York Times*, Shabazz answered Elijah Muhammad's naysayers, defending the prophetic leader's religious and political philosophy of racial separatism against attacks by Sunni Muslim students and other practitioners.<sup>16</sup>

But Shabazz also carefully considered their arguments. For example, when Ahmed Osman, a Dartmouth College student of Sudanese heritage, sought out Shabazz at Harlem's Mosque No. 7 in 1962 to challenge him on the legitimacy of Elijah Muhammad's teachings, Shabazz agreed to read the Sunni Muslim missionary literature that the student offered, stayed in touch with Osman, and asked for more. The literature that he read was from the Islamic Center in Geneva, Switzerland, a community run by Said Ramadan, the son-in-law of Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood was Egypt's premier Islamist group, focusing on political and religious reform of Egyptian society and the state under the banner of Islamic religion.<sup>17</sup>

Attributing Shabazz's changing attitudes toward Elijah Muhammad to the influence of Sunni Islamic teachings or Sunni Muslim organizations may be going too far, but well before Shabazz formally separated from the Nation of Islam, he clearly began to alter his interpretations of Elijah Muhammad's teachings, including the idea that the white man was the devil. "When you are a Muslim," he said on a U.S. radio program on May 12, 1963, "you don't look at the color of a man's skin.... You look at the man and judge him according to his conscious behavior." Muslims

in America, he said, should practice this principle in the same way that Muslims abroad did. This argument indicated a shift in Shabazz's religious geography away from what the Nation of Islam founder, W. D. Fard, called the “wilderness of North America”—the land where God incarnate (Fard) appeared to the prophet, Elijah Muhammad—and toward the *umma* (the worldwide community of Muslims). Though he may have left the NOI because he could no longer tolerate Elijah Muhammad's philandering, or, perhaps more importantly, because Shabazz found Elijah Muhammad's approach to civil rights and political philosophy of black liberation too passive—it is important to emphasize that, as he makes clear in both his diaries and his autobiography, he was also embracing a form of Islam that he considered more “orthodox.”<sup>18</sup>

## **From the Arab Cold War to an Islamic Liberation Ethic**

According to several sources, including the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the relationship with Osman and other Muslims led Malcolm X to seek out Mahmoud Yousef Shawarbi, an Egyptian professor of Islamic studies who had visited the United States in the 1950s, served as a visiting faculty member at Fordham University on a Fulbright Fellowship, and in January 1964 was appointed head of the Federation of Islamic Associations of United States and Canada, the largest American Sunni Muslim group at the time. Shabazz already possessed a large network of Muslim allies and conversation partners from sub-Saharan Africa, Pakistan, and the Middle East, but over the next year, Arabic-speaking Muslims—Sudanese, Egyptian, and Saudi—played a particularly significant role in Shabazz's thinking. Shawarbi was one of them. He encouraged Shabazz to make the hajj, and, most importantly, introduced him to the well-heeled Saudis and Egyptians who could make it possible. One of those people was Abd al-Rahman Azzam.<sup>19</sup>

Azzam, an Egyptian diplomat, was the architect and first secretary general of the Arab League from 1945 to 1952. For decades, Azzam Pasha, as he was called, had been a prominent Egyptian nationalist, but after Nasser rose to power in the 1952 revolution against the Egyptian monarchy, Azzam increasingly lost favor with the regime. He moved to Saudi Arabia and became a leading theorist of what is sometimes called political Islam or Islamism, the belief that Islam is both a religion and a state (but not necessarily a theocracy). The idea that Islam offered resources for political action and governance was not new to Azzam; the Egyptian national identity that he had advocated was informed by recognition of Egypt's Islamic heritage. But in his Saudi exile, he devoted increasing effort to forging transnational ties among Muslims committed to evangelizing on behalf of a utopian Islamic society. His most famous book, which Shawarbi gave to Shabazz, was *The Eternal Message of Muhammad*. The book reiterates the calls of modern Muslim reformers who said that Islam could and should be the animating force behind the modern nation-state. Islam was a religion, Azzam said, and also “a law, a way of life, a ‘nation,’ and a ‘state.’” According to Azzam, the ideal Islamic nation-state would be governed by reason rather than superstition, respect the diversity of its citizens, and encourage in its citizenry the love of charity, fairness, industriousness, mercy, and solidarity. While theocratic in some respects, this Islamic nation-state opposed dictatorship; the consent of the state's citizens was required for legitimacy. In this Islamic utopia, many of liberalism's best elements would be preserved, while its less desirable aspects, such as materialism, colonialism, and class struggle, would be eliminated.<sup>20</sup>

Shabazz read Azzam's book on his way to the hajj on April 13, 1964, but Shawarbi had given him more than the book. He also shared the phone number of his son Muhammad, who lived in Cairo, and the phone number of Azzam's son Omar Azzam, who lived in Jidda. When Shabazz

was detained by the hajj court to determine his bona fides as a Muslim, Omar Azzam interceded with Saudi authorities on his behalf. The Azzams were connected to the Saudi monarchy through marriage: the son of Prince Faysal, the de facto ruler of the kingdom, was married to Azzam Pasha's daughter. With such royal connections, it was only a matter of time before the hajj court allowed Shabazz to participate in the hajj. Saudi deputy chief of protocol Muhammad Abdul Aziz Majid even offered Shabazz a chauffeured car during his visit. During his time in Jidda, Shabazz stayed in Azzam's suite at the Jidda Palace Hotel. After the hajj was over, Prince Faysal met with Shabazz to satisfy himself that Shabazz's conversion to Sunni Islam was sincere and legitimate.<sup>21</sup>

As Shabazz's network of Arab Muslim government officials, missionaries, friends, and contacts began to multiply, he entered a social and political world shaped significantly by a conflict between Nasser's UAR and Saudi Arabia. As the United States and the Soviet Union sought allies in their global Cold War, Arab states began to align with, challenge, and/or play Soviet and U.S. interests against one another; these Arab states also needed to negotiate the popular desire for Arab political unity and the widespread sympathy for the plight of Palestinians, who became stateless in 1948. By the late 1950s, a regional conflict emerged between those aligned with the Arab socialism of Egyptian president Nasser—which became increasingly seen by the U.S. government as under the Soviet sphere of influence—and those powers, often allies of the United States, opposed to Nasser's expansive vision of Arab political unity. In 1958, after Syria and Egypt formally united under Nasser's presidency in the UAR, other states in the Arab Middle East became vulnerable to popular revolutions inspired by or allied with Nasser. Months after the founding of the UAR, the Iraqi army overthrew its nation's Hashemite monarchy, and an uprising against Lebanese president Camille Chamoun was put down only with the assistance of the U.S.

military. By 1962 Nasser had committed ground troops to the Yemeni civil war on the side of the republican forces of Abdullah al-Sallah against those loyal to the Imamate. Saudi Arabia, which shared a border with Yemen, supported the latter forces.<sup>22</sup>

Another front in this Arab Cold War was the battle for hearts and minds, and it was into this crucible that Malik Shabazz was thrust. Shabazz's royal treatment in Saudi Arabia and his long stay in Egypt indicate that both Saudis and Egyptians prized their burgeoning relationship with the man who was likely the best-known African American Sunni Muslim in the United States. Shabazz became a player in the public relations and soft diplomacy fronts of the Arab Cold War as both UAR- and Saudi-sponsored organizations sought to use Islamic missionizing to gain Muslim allies and to influence non-Muslim public opinion abroad.<sup>23</sup>

Through the nationalization of state institutions Nasser also attempted to control or at least influence how Islamic religion was being interpreted, taught, and applied in Egyptian schools, courts, and government agencies. According to the historian Reinhold Schulze, "the wave of nationalization in industry and finance, which started in 1961, as well as new attempts to revive land reform, established the framework for an Islamic interpretation of socialism." Nasser made sure that his political program of Arab nationalism, socialism, pan-Africanism, and Third World solidarity was legitimated in Islamic terms. Thus, in 1960, the UAR established the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (SCIA) and charged it with promoting what might be called "Islamic liberation socialism" in the developing world. In 1961 Nasser effectively nationalized al-Azhar University in Cairo, striking fear in the hearts of Saudi leaders that the Arab world's most fabled Islamic university would now produce Islamic scholarship supporting Nasserism.<sup>24</sup>



The Saudis responded by expediting a plan for the establishment of their own Islamic university in Medina. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also began spending significant money to develop Islamic missionary activity as a form of soft power and cultural diplomacy. Tracing their own political legitimacy to the Wahhabi religious reform movement and their status as the protectors of the holy places in Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia's rulers began to offer financial support and to build a missionary infrastructure that would bolster the kingdom's claims to be a leader of *dar al-islam*, meaning "Islamdom" or the "House of Islam." In 1962, the same year that Nasser committed ground troops to the civil war in Yemen, the Saudi government allied with Islamist activists from Asia and Africa to create the Muslim World League (MWL). The timing was not a coincidence. At the MWL inaugural conference, speakers strongly opposed Nasser and his form of Arabism, offering pan-Islamic unity as a counter to the powerful Arab populist. The meeting featured a remarkable array of activists committed to a greater or lesser degree to the same ideas outlined in Azzam's *Eternal Message of Muhammad*. They included Abul Ala Mawdudi of Pakistan's Jama'at-i Islami, Pakistan's most powerful Islamist organization, and Sa'id Ramadan, the son-in-law of the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, which had been forcefully repressed by Nasser.<sup>25</sup>

Simply put, Malik Shabazz worked with allies of both the UAR and Saudi governments, and in his public pronouncements in the United States, Shabazz did not take sides in the conflict. But in his private correspondence and in speeches made in Egypt, Shabazz was more forthcoming: he favored Nasser's revolutionary approach to the problems of people of color. Even though Nasser's critics in the MWL accused the Egyptian leader of being un-Islamic, Shabazz saw him as a leader willing and able to bring to life an Islamic liberation ethics.

Shabazz developed this idea most fully in speeches he made during his long stay in Egypt during the second half of 1964. A few months after performing the pilgrimage to Mecca, touring West Africa, and only briefly taking care of business at home in New York, Shabazz returned to Egypt to attend the African Summit Conference of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in July. Shabazz's goal was to convince African leaders that “our problem is your problem,” that is, to link the domestic struggles of African Americans for dignity and self-determination to the struggle of African states and colonies for political and economic independence. With nearly every African head of state in attendance, Shabazz pleaded in an eight-page memo for the OAU to internationalize the U.S. civil rights struggle. He hoped that the African states would support bringing the case of African Americans to the United Nations, thus transforming the battle for civil rights into a struggle for human rights. In response to President Nasser's praise for the passage of the 1964 U.S. Civil Right Act, Shabazz warned delegates of the “trickery” of the U.S. government, which he said was “the century's leading neo-colonialist power.” While the conference passed a tepid resolution indicating its solidarity with African Americans, Shabazz was disappointed with the results.<sup>26</sup>

After the conference, Shabazz stayed in Egypt for Islamic studies training from the SCIA, which welcomed the chance to host Shabazz and was willing to underwrite his travels. According to Shabazz's diaries, Shawarbi continued to act as a main interlocutor with the Egyptian government and often with Egyptians more generally, though Shabazz also met and socialized with Americans in Cairo, including David Du Bois, who was the editor of the English-language newspaper *Egyptian Gazette*, and Akbar Muhammad, the son of Elijah Muhammad and an Islamic studies student at al-Azhar University with whom Shabazz had corresponded since 1961. During this period in Egypt, Shabazz studied the foundations of Islamic religious traditions—

such as the Qur'an and the five pillars. He was also exposed to the political interpretations of these traditions that supported the Nasserite revolution on behalf of the oppressed. That Shabazz was both invited and willing to give public speeches about religion and politics indicates that both parties—the SCIA and Shabazz—had found common ground.<sup>27</sup>

On July 27, 1964, Shabazz addressed a crowd at the Young Men's Muslim Association (YMMA) in Cairo. Founded in September 1927, the YMMA (whose Arabic name could also be translated as the Society of Muslim Youth) had from its beginning combined Islamic religion with Egyptian nationalism. Given the revolutionary fervor of Nasser's popular revolution in the early 1960s, the organization was an ideal setting for Shabazz to rally popular support for his bid to link the African American struggle to the Third World liberation politics of Egyptians. It was during this speech that Shabazz offered the fullest expression of his emerging Islamic ethics of liberation.<sup>28</sup>

In the version of the speech that he handwrote in cursive in his diary, Shabazz began with a religious testimonial emphasizing gratitude to God: “I am proud and thankful to Allah for blessing me to be a Muslim. Ever since I first heard about Islam and accepted it as my religion, Allah has blessed me in many ways, and with friends in all walks of life.” His outline of the speech, the one in which he listed the qualities of Nasser, also noted that he was honored to “address you on [the] birthday of our great prophet of Islam: Sayyidna Muhammed (P & B).” This formulaic praise to the Prophet, including the word *Sayyidna* (our master) and the phrase *P & B* (praise and blessings be upon him), indicate Shabazz's fluency in the forms of religious rhetoric familiar to his audience in Cairo and used by Muslims across the globe. Shabazz then expressed his gratitude for the *umma*, the imagined global community of Muslims. “Since

becoming a Muslim,” he said, “I have traveled much throughout the world, to many lands and places, but I have never entered a Muslim country and felt like I was a stranger.” Islam, he testified, was the social glue that bound together different people across linguistic, national, and ethnic boundaries: “I have found nothing but love, friendship, hospitality and true brotherhood wherever I have gone among Muslims, because Islam is the religion of the true brotherhood, a religion in which Allah has made all who accept *Him* look upon all of our fellow-humans as brothers and sisters.”<sup>29</sup>

In his next statement, however, Shabazz made clear that this Islamic brotherhood carried serious ethical and political implications. It was not enough to offer words of friendship; true brotherhood needed to be more than a disembodied sentiment: “One of the greatest blessings a man can have is a *true* friend, a true brother.... As Muslims, we want for our brothers the same things that we want for ourselves. The well-being of our brother becomes our well-being. His happiness is our happiness.... His pain and his sorrow becomes our pain and our sorrow.” Shabazz was moving the audience toward his call to action, but first he reminded them that Islam was the only force capable of forging “unselfish concern for our brothers and sisters all over the world,” the kind of human solidarity that he was envisioning.<sup>30</sup>

Shabazz asserted that “true” Islamic brotherhood must be expressed in a form of revolutionary praxis. And Egyptians were fortunate, he said, to have a living example of that praxis. “In my humble opinion,” he proclaimed, “President Gamal A. Nasser reflects an excellent of the type of unselfish fighting-spirit needed by true Muslims.” Contrary to criticisms of Nasser as irreligious or secular, Shabazz made clear that the Egyptian leader embodied what it meant to be a real Muslim. “His [Nasser's] concept of Islam doesn't keep him from being a militant leader in the

struggle against oppression,” he said, echoing a thought that he would express until his death: religion cannot impede liberation but instead must fuel it. Alluding to Nasser's leadership in the OAU and his activism on behalf of oppressed people outside the UAR, Shabazz argued that “he has dedicated all his time and energy to restore freedom and human dignity not only to the people of the United Arab Republic but also to oppressed Arabs, Africans, Muslims as well as non-Muslims everywhere on this earth.” Weaving his initial theme of Islamic universal brotherhood together with Nasser's policy positions, Shabazz went on to declare that Nasser's “concept of Islam forces him to fight for the liberation of all oppressed people, whether they are Muslims or otherwise, because Islam teaches us that all of humanity comes from Allah, and all of humanity has the same God-given right to freedom, justice, equality—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>31</sup>

This statement is a hermeneutical key to understanding Shabazz's emerging ethics of liberation. He argued that Islam did more than permit political activism—it “forces” all those truly concerned about the oppressed, whether Muslim or not, to take action on their behalf. In just a few sentences, Malik Shabazz created a rhetorical arc that began with Islamic universalism, traveled through the liberal values expressed in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, and ended at Nasser's advocacy of independence from Western domination and white supremacy. Interpreting and appropriating multiple intellectual traditions, Shabazz insisted that Arabs and Muslims in Egypt who claimed to uphold Islamic values must work for the freedom of all oppressed people of color, Muslim or not.

Shabazz then called his audience to action. “In most areas of this earth, especially Asia and Africa, the dark-skinned *majorities* were oppressed,” he said. The situation was even worse for

African Americans, he stated, because they were minorities. “In the world history of oppression, the case of 22 million oppressed Afro Americans is uniquely different,” Shabazz stated. “If here on this African continent you found yourselves tortured and exploited by a European minority, right here in your own land,” he added for emphasis, “imagine the pain, torture and exploitation we suffer.” He declared that black Americans are “still colonized in America by the brothers of the Europeans and they outnumber us.” And then for anyone who had not yet understood what he was saying, Shabazz made it plain. He vowed that he would always “fight for the spread of Islam until all the world bows before Allah, but as an Afro-American, I can never overlook the miserable plight of my people.” Shabazz embraced a dual identity as a Muslim preacher and black liberation activist: “I come before you here in the Muslim World not only to rejoice over the wonderful blessings of Islam but also ... to remind you that there are 22 million of us in America, many of whom have never heard of Allah and Islam.” If Muslims were going to condemn apartheid South Africa, insisted Shabazz, they were also obligated to condemn the neocolonialism of America: “In Allah's eyesight, racism must be openly condemned whether it is the open kind practiced by South Africa or whether it is the deceitful, hypocritical kind practiced by America.” In the version of the speech released to the public in the United States on August 6, 1964, by his assistant, James Shabazz, he also said that aiding the African American struggle was “the moral responsibility of the entire Muslim World—if you hope to make the principles of the Quran a *Living Reality*.” Shabazz evoked here almost exactly the same thought that he expressed a few months before in a letter written from Lagos, Nigeria, in which he said that the Muslim world had an obligation to aid in the struggle for liberation of oppressed people no matter what their religion.<sup>32</sup>

Shabazz's remarks in Cairo demonstrated his belief that the struggle for human rights would be best accomplished by the kind of political program implemented by Nasser. In this formulation, Shabazz saw no necessary contradiction between his religious and political commitments. Islam, exemplified by Nasser, was not only a form of personal piety but also an ethical obligation to the rest of humanity. Its radically egalitarian nature required political and, if necessary, military action on behalf of the oppressed. Shabazz argued, whether he was abroad or at home, that African Americans in the United States were among the most oppressed peoples on earth. Their liberation from white supremacy, like the liberation of their brothers and sisters in Asia and Africa from colonialism, was an Islamic religious imperative. Although some may be tempted to claim that Shabazz was merely using Islamic rhetoric, Muslim solidarity, and the institutional support that Arab Muslims could provide as a means to further the goal of political liberation and his own role in bringing it about, that view seems too cynical. This basic ethical philosophy linking religion and politics had been a consistent theme in Shabazz's life since the 1950s. Shabazz had chosen to be a Sunni Muslim political activist when he could have joined any number of other movements focused on black liberation. Even after he questioned his faith in Elijah Muhammad, the man whom he had once called his savior, he willingly became a neophyte in Sunni Islam, humbly accepting instruction from other religious authorities. Through it all, Shabazz remained committed to the idea of a liberating religion, and the state-sponsored version of Islam he saw in Egypt came closest to his ideal. Though "state-sponsored Islam," and especially the Islamic Nasserism constructed by Al-Azhar University, the SCIA, and other Egyptian institutions, would later be criticized and seen as an illegitimate or unpopular form of Islam, this is not how many Muslims, both inside and outside Egypt, necessarily saw it in the 1960s.<sup>33</sup>

Shabazz's reaction to a youth conference held in August 1964 in Alexandria, Egypt, makes clear his enthusiasm for this revolutionary Islam. Organized by the SCIA, the Abu Bakr Siddiq Camp for Muslim Youth welcomed Muslims from around the world. Often overlooked or underanalyzed in accounts of Shabazz's final year, this conference, which featured hundreds of Muslim youth from what Malcolm described as seventy-four different countries, generated feelings of religious solidarity that rivaled or surpassed those that Shabazz had experienced during his hajj. "This affair," he wrote, "impressed me even more than my trip to Mecca: youth from everywhere, face of every complexion, representing every race and every culture ... all shouting the glory of Islam, filled with a militant revolutionary spirit and zeal."<sup>34</sup>

Having learned only on the train trip from Cairo to Alexandria that he would be addressing the youth conference, Shabazz was not "only shocked, but nervous and frightened." When he arrived at the meeting place in Alexandria, he was greeted by a long reception line of youths, shouting, "Welcome Malcolm!" According to Shabazz, "it was so exciting, so unexpected by me, such an honor, I hardly knew what to say or how to react." Such sentiments were almost exactly those that Shabazz expressed when he was received in a similar fashion at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria earlier in the year, the moment described in the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* when he was given the moniker Omowale, the son who has come home. In Alexandria, the honoring of Shabazz was not about welcoming home a lost son but about saluting a fellow fighter in the struggle against the oppression of Africans, Asians, and other people of color. According to Shabazz, the meeting began with a recitation from the Qur'an, and then young people from Uganda, the Philippines, and the United Arab Republic addressed the crowd, making "speeches of welcome and support for the Afro-American struggle." As they spoke, male and female audience members "jumped to their feet shouting beautiful slogans of support and unity in our



common struggle.” An SCIA official then announced that he was granting Shabazz's community of African American Muslims in the United States twenty scholarships so that they could come to Egypt to further their studies. Finally, Shabazz spoke for what he described was half an hour followed by a speech from his translator on “the importance of doing, producing ... *action*.” The meeting concluded with the singing of a Muslim anthem that, he said, sounded like a fight song.<sup>35</sup>

It is no wonder that the event was so impressive to him—Shabazz finally heard, coming from the mouths of Muslim youths from around the world, the kind of religious and political solidarity with African Americans for which he had been pleading and petitioning African leaders at the OAU African summit. Shabazz noted with satisfaction that the young Muslims expressed their support “stripped of the ‘diplomacy’ I had heard at the Summit.” Unlike the tepid communiqué that the African leaders issued in support of African Americans, the expressions of these youths were full-throated and revolutionary.<sup>36</sup>

Given Shabazz's strong connections to the state-sponsored Islamic institutions of the UAR and his public endorsement of Nasserism, one might assume that he had strongly taken Nasser's side in the Arab Cold War. Yet Shabazz also maintained ties to Muslims aligned with Saudi Arabia. Though not as sympathetic to the Saudi side, Shabazz still hoped to use his connections to the Saudi-sponsored MWL to further his mission to build a successful community of African American Muslims in New York and beyond. To do so, he sought Saudi financial support and their religious imprimatur.

In September 1964, after Shabazz collected a credential from Al-Azhar University that certified him as a Muslim missionary, he went to obtain similar credentials from the MWL. Once in Saudi

Arabia, Shabazz performed *'umra* and, more importantly, underwent additional religious training. His education was overseen by Shaykh Muhammad Sarur as-Sabban. As-Sabban, the descendent of black slaves, was a former finance minister of Saudi Arabia who became the MWL's first secretary general. In his diary, Shabazz considered the idea of naming a mosque in New York after the “tall, black, very alert, and commanding” Sabban, “using his life story as the inspiration,” as Shabazz put it. Shabazz also obtained pledges from Saudi officials for financial support of a new mosque and fifteen scholarships to the University of Medina for members of his community.<sup>37</sup>

Having conducted what he considered to be fruitful trips to both Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Shabazz left for another tour of sub-Saharan African countries. He had meetings with eleven African heads of state, including Kenyan president Jomo Kenyatta, and gave public remarks that focused less on Islamic matters and more on black solidarity and neocolonialism. Shabazz finally returned home to New York on November 27, 1964, and went back to work to catch up on business left undone during his long absence. Shabazz soon followed up with his Arab Muslim sponsors to secure the funding and scholarships offered by both the SCIA and the MWL. He immediately cabled and/or wrote letters to the leaders of both organizations. This correspondence reveals not only Shabazz's highly strategic and pragmatic approach to networking and fund raising with numerous interests in the Arab Middle East but also his preference for the Nasserite position in the Arab Cold War.<sup>38</sup>

On November 30, 1964, he wrote to both the MWL and SCIA. His plea to Sabban of the MWL was particularly urgent because an MWL missionary had arrived in New York expecting Shabazz's community to provide hospitality and financial support. Writing from his East

Elmhurst address in New York, Shabazz began this letter with a word of gratitude for the presence of the Sudanese religious scholar Ahmad Hassoun, an MWL affiliate knowledgeable about Islam, the Qur'an, and Arabic. But he added that his New York community could not pay this religious teacher because they were “very poor.” Shabazz had been under the impression that the Muslim World League or the Saudi government would pay for the teacher's expenses and apologized for any misunderstanding. He said it was an “embarrassing predicament.” The reason for his organization's poverty, he explained, was because he had left “all our treasuries in the Black Muslim Movement.” Shabazz proposed a detailed budget for Hassoun and asked for at least six month's support.<sup>39</sup>

In the final paragraph of the letter, Shabazz's tone became more urgent, describing the situation as a “financial crisis.” In fact, he continued, Hassoun seemed to think that the community did not want him and had expressed a desire to return home. Asking for an immediate response, Shabazz assured Sabban that “I consider myself a complete servant of yours and of the Muslim World League and I await your instructions.” In its tone the letter sounds humble and even obsequious, and yet it is clear that Shabazz, like fund-raisers and grant writers before and after him, tailored his request in terms that he believed would increase his chances of obtaining financial support. Shabazz was adopting the voice of humility as a strategic choice, as he made clear in other correspondence written the same day.<sup>40</sup>

In the letter Shabazz wrote to Muhammad Taufik Oweida, the UAR minister of *awqaf* (religious endowments), he sought to reassure the Egyptians that his relationships with the Saudis did not reflect his deepest political and religious commitments. This fascinating letter began with words of thanks to President Nasser and the SCIA and then offered a prayer: “May Allah grant

President Gamal Abdul Nasser a long life and good health,” wrote Shabazz, “for he has a tremendous task ahead of him in desire to revolutionize and modernize the thinking of the Arab World, the African World, and the Muslim World.” Shabazz stated that his mission depended in no small part on cultivating ties to Saudi-funded interests. “I have gone quite far in establishing myself and the Muslim Mosque Inc., also with the Muslim World League,” Shabazz explained. “I am hoping that you understand my strategy in cementing good relations with them.” Then Shabazz's rhetoric turned romantic. “My heart is in Cairo,” he declared. “And I believe the more progressive relations [sic] forces in the Muslim world are in Cairo.” But Shabazz asserted that he could better advance the cause of Cairo “by solidifying myself also with the more moderate or conservative forces that are headquartered in Mecca.” Sounding almost like an intelligence officer, Shabazz added that when he was in Geneva, Switzerland, he “even took time to speak with [Muslim Brother and Islamic Center director] Said Ramadan so that I could find out what he was thinking without ever letting him know what I was really thinking.”<sup>41</sup>

This admission too seemed to be a strategic partial truth—a spin that would reassure his Egyptian government allies that he was not going to become allies with the Muslim Brothers, which Nasser had declared to be his enemy. While it remains unclear what Shabazz found attractive about Ramadan and the Muslim Brothers, it is evident that his relationship with them was no passing interest. He began to receive literature from Said Ramadan's Islamic Center in Geneva as early as 1962, and on April 30, 1964, after giving a speech at the Sudanese Cultural Center in Beirut and dining at the home of Dr. Malik Badri, who was his host for the 1959 visit to Khartoum, Shabazz visited the Muslim Brothers' office in Lebanon. They “gave me a very touching send-off,” he wrote in his diary. When he decided to stop over in Geneva to visit Ramadan, Shabazz likely hoped that the organization would offer financial and institutional

support to his community in the United States; after all, he knew from the Dartmouth student Ahmed Osman and Muslim leader Mahmoud Yousef Shawarbi that the group had allies and members in the United States. Perhaps Shabazz also found attractive their calls for Muslim unity as a form of politics, though he may not have wanted to say so publicly.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever the case, Shabazz's relationship to these Islamists was not an uncritical one. He issued serious public criticism of Said Ramadan's utopian notions of race relations. In one of his last interviews, Shabazz penned answers in February 1965 to questions that Ramadan had posed to him in a November 1964 letter. In this long-distance interview for *Al-Muslimoon* magazine, Ramadan challenged Shabazz to abandon his rhetoric of racial liberation. Was it true, Ramadan wrote, that “you still hold Black color as a main base and dogma for your drive under the banner of liberation?” If that was the case, Ramadan asked, how “could a man of your spirit, intellect, and worldwide outlook fail to see” that Islam affirms the equality of all people, “thus striking at the very root of ... racial discrimination?” In his response, Shabazz claimed that nonblack Muslims had done very little to convert African Americans to Islam, instead focusing on whites. In other words, Shabazz pointed out Ramadan's hypocrisy: If Islam erases racial discrimination, then why are so many foreign Muslims still racist in their missionizing strategies? Even more, Shabazz offered a simple rejection of Ramadan's argument that he stop focusing so much on black liberation. “As a Black American,” Shabazz wrote, “I do feel that my first responsibility is to my twenty-two million fellow Black Americans.” Such forceful language evidenced Shabazz's determination to remain independent despite his need for the assistance of Ramadan's allies in the MWL.<sup>43</sup>

Shabazz's rejection of Ramadan's belief that Islam erased racial prejudice was also a critique of a modern, liberal interpretation of religion as inner-directed and private. Ramadan was implying that if everyone converted to Islam, then, miraculously, individuals would no longer be racist, and the social structures of which they were part would thus embody racial equality. The argument that racial equality might be achieved through mass conversion to Islam reflected a strand of the Muslim Brotherhood's approach to social change: namely, that the Islamization of individuals through religious revival was a necessary precondition of lasting political transformation. In fact, by the 1970s, the Muslim Brothers came to an agreement with the government of Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, to focus on philanthropic activities such as social and medical services and missionary work. A minority of Islamists outside of the Brotherhood then used violence to spur top-down political change in Egypt.<sup>44</sup>

How Malik Shabazz would have reacted to these developments is impossible to know, but in the 1960s he clearly did not believe in the ability of an individualistic religion to alter the political and social status quo. Well known for his dismissal of pie-in-the-sky, understand-it-better-by-and-bye Christianity when he was a leader of the Nation of Islam, Shabazz's conversion to Sunni Islam did not temper his criticism of individualistic, otherworldly religion. In 1964 and 1965, when journalists queried Shabazz about whether he was becoming more religious and less political, they were assuming that religion was, or at least should be, apolitical. Shabazz thus told a *New York Post* reporter in February 1965 that “the problem of the black man go beyond religion.” Given his other public comments about the nature of religion, this statement seems to have meant that the problems of black people could not be solved by a liberal vision that confined religion to the private sphere. What was required, as he said in other instances, was a religion of praxis, the kind of religion that he described both in Cairo and Alexandria. “I believe

in religion,” he said on February 3 to an audience at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, “but a religion that includes political, economic, and social action designed to ... make a paradise here on earth while we're waiting for the other.”<sup>45</sup>

## **The Trans/national History of African American Islam**

That Shabazz used a critique of religion that was developed in the postwar United States to respond to the social-change theories of an Egyptian Islamist activist in Geneva is only one indication of the transnational nature of his story. Shabazz's Islamic ethics of liberation only becomes clear by analyzing the text of his diaries and letters in terms of a regional conflict in the Middle East. Thus does the Arab Cold War become part of the history of the United States in the 1960s.

The case of Malik Shabazz also suggests other important insights into the development of African American Muslim history and the nature of twentieth-century transnational contacts. Shabazz's time in the Middle East shows how his ideological commitments, communal loyalties, and political goals were both changed and sustained by his international travel and religious study. As the political scientist Roxanne Euben has observed, travel need not result in any fundamental shift in a traveler's consciousness or identity; travel is just as likely to inspire “critical distance” and “sharp closures in which prejudices harden” as it is to encourage personal transformation. It all depends, Euben argues, on “a complex and mercurial interaction of the personal, political, historical, and institutional.” Examining the political implications of translocal cultural exchanges, the anthropologist James Clifford similarly argues that “transnational travels and contacts—of people, things, and media—do not point in a single

historical direction.” In a world where crossings have differing effects on the structures of power, Clifford advocates the view that “what matters politically is who deploys nationality or transnationality, authenticity or hybridity, against whom, with what relative power and ability to sustain its hegemony.”<sup>46</sup>

In Shabazz's case, his geographic imagination, religious identity, and political loyalties were focused on both the dark world and Muslim-majority countries long before he left for his first trip to Africa and the Middle East in 1959. During the 1950s in Harlem, Shabazz's interaction with people committed to the solidarity of nonwhite and/or Muslim nations and groups led him to trumpet Islam as a means of political liberation for all people of color, no matter where they lived. By 1964, he began to state more forcefully the idea that all Muslims must actively oppose white supremacy and foster black self-determination. Having been a supporter of Nasser for years, Shabazz identified the Egyptian leader—in a sense replacing the prophet Elijah Muhammad—as a champion of this ethical vision. But as a pragmatic leader of a nascent Muslim organization who desired international Muslim support and acceptance, Shabazz also cultivated close ties with Nasser's rivals. Shabazz resisted aspects of his allies' ideologies that he found unacceptable—such as Said Ramadan's insistence that mass conversion to Islam would solve the global problem of antiblack racism—while accepting the Islamic missionary training that he found religiously and politically valuable.

After Shabazz's death in 1965, several African American Muslim groups (all of which are in need of further study) appropriated aspects of Shabazz's legacy while also adopting and adapting the political and religious practices and beliefs of foreign and American-born Muslim missionaries. Among these groups are the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood (mib); Darul Islam;



and the Islamic Party of North America. New Yorker Khalid Ahmad Tawfiq, for example, was a follower of Shabazz who used one of the twenty scholarships awarded to the Muslim Mosque, Inc., by the SCIA in Cairo. After returning from study at Al-Azhar University, he established the mib in 1967. Tawfiq followed in Shabazz's footsteps by combining a commitment to Sunni piety with a strong emphasis on black consciousness and self-determination. Thus, at its Harlem headquarters the mib hoisted a red, black, and green flag—the colors of African independence—that included a star and crescent. Throughout the 1970s, believers lived communally in Harlem and sought to give their children an Afrocentric Islamic education.<sup>47</sup>

The attempt to interpret Shabazz's legacy as a form of praxis that combined pietistic Islamic religion with black liberation politics drew severe criticism from leaders such as the Black Panther party prime minister Stokely Carmichael and writers such as Chancellor Williams, the author of *The Destruction of Black Civilization* (1971). Carmichael insisted that Islam was not an African religion, but a foreign invader that conquered and enslaved African people. Likewise, Williams portrayed Arabs as one of the many enemies that had wrecked the indigenous traditions of Africans. These charges perpetuated a concern that has haunted African American Islam from its origins in the first half of the twentieth century: Would black Americans who adopt Arab, Asian, or Islamic identities betray their true identities as blacks or as people of African descent?<sup>48</sup>

Malik Shabazz's understanding of Islam and politics attempted to exorcise this ghost of racial betrayal. When Shabazz returned from his first trip to Saudi Arabia, his defense of Arabs as racial brothers and sisters responded to criticisms of Saudi slavery and antiblack racism in the Arab world by including Arabs in a black racial taxonomy. His altered racial taxonomy resisted

the limitation of African American identity to “Negro” or black Atlantic frameworks; it redrew the geographic boundaries of an imperial racial map rooted deeply in modern scientific and philosophical racism that insisted on a stark division between “black” Africa, which sat at the bottom of the civilizational order, and North Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean world. His example demonstrates how transnational contacts between black Americans and Muslims in Africa and Asia were deployed to reconnoiter the racially fragmented map (a product of European colonialism) and, more pragmatically, to establish the racial and religious solidarities through which a campaign could be waged for human rights, decolonization, and racial empowerment. His Islamic ethics of liberation directly implicated all Muslims, regardless of their racial, ethnic, or national identity, in the global struggle against racism and the oppression of people of color.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, Shabazz's appeal to transnational political solidarity and positioning of black identity in a transnational space cannot be understood in isolation from Shabazz's activism within a more narrowly focused national framework. The meaning and function of Islam changed as it traveled with Shabazz across national, regional, racial, and other social borders. Shabazz's deep interaction with both sides of the Arab Cold War, the Saudi religious establishment, the Muslim Brothers, and their allies suggest that Muslim Americans do not, and did not, simply adopt whole cloth the thoughts of their foreign teachers. While Shabazz may have felt at home, as he said at different times, in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Egypt, or Nigeria, he understood himself as arriving home when he returned to the business of institution building in New York City. Shabazz exemplifies how certain Islamic interpretations are more attractive than others and how Muslim Americans, even those such as Shabazz who are not experts in Qur'anic studies or Islamic law, can negotiate, challenge, and interpret authoritative Islamic traditions for themselves. Histories

of African American and American Muslims more generally should adopt a skeptical stance toward any study, including policy- and security-oriented studies, that perpetuates the notion that any connection with a foreign power—be it Islamist or not—somehow renders the historical agency of black Muslims null and void. Even when Muslim Americans support some cause abroad, we must ask to what extent such solidarity is expressive not only of transnational solidarities but also of national, local, and personal identities.<sup>50</sup>

Likewise, new histories of African American Muslim groups and individuals will probably discover that religions that are framed as foreign by their own practitioners are also American. Those African American Muslims in the late 1960s and 1970s who donned *kuffiyas* (male Arab headdress) and *hijabs* (female head scarves), and in some cases started speaking with an Arabic accent were participating in a larger wave of American ethnic revival. Their new ethnic-religious identities represented a meeting of foreign and domestic visions that were played out largely on American streets, in schools and homes, and in entrepreneurial ventures. Seeing how Shabazz and the African American Muslims inspired by his example kept the liberation of black Americans at the center of their activism demonstrates that an international and global approach to U.S. history does not diminish the importance of the nation-state as a unit of historical analysis. It simply shows that the nation-state, its power and limitations, must be analyzed through a wider lens.<sup>51</sup>

## Notes

1. Malcolm X Diary, July 1964 (microfilm: reel 9), Malcolm X Collection: Papers, 1948–1965 (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York). This list is also quoted and documented in Maytha Alhassen, “The ‘Three Circles’ Construction: Reading Black Atlantic Islam through Malcolm X's Words and Friendships,” *Journal of Africana Religions*, 3 (Jan. 2015), 7, 15n17. On the collection, see “The Malcolm X Collection: Papers, 1948–1965,” *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library*, [https://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/malcolm\\_x\\_0.pdf](https://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/malcolm_x_0.pdf).
2. Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Cairo, 1955), 53–54. This book was also published in the United States as Gamal Abdul Nasser, *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Washington, 1955).
3. Malik El-Shabazz's diaries and letters from 1964 and 1965, kept in storage by his family and only made available to scholars and the public in the early twenty-first century, reveal previously unknown data about the leader, especially about the five months that he spent in Africa and the Middle East in 1964. They record his impressions of African and west Asian people and places, and the Muslim, African, and Arab activists, politicians, students, and others whom he met; information on his daily devotional prayers as a Muslim and his training as an Islamic missionary; and his constant rethinking of how Islamic religion and pan-Africanism might produce justice and dignity for people of color around the world. On the history of these documents, see “Malcolm X Papers Find a Home at nypl,” *American Libraries*, 34 (Feb. 2003), 18. Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A*

*Life of Reinvention* (New York, 2011), 12. Manning Marable's book generated enormous controversy and several rejoinders. See "A Fiery Debate on New Malcolm X Biography: Amiri Baraka v. Michael Eric Dyson," *Huffington Post*, May 19, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/democracy-now/a-fiery-debate-on-new-mal\\_b\\_864351.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/democracy-now/a-fiery-debate-on-new-mal_b_864351.html); Herb Boyd et al., eds., *By Any Means Necessary: Malcolm X—Real, Not Reinvented* (Chicago, 2012); and Jared A. Ball and Todd Steven Burroughs, eds., *A Lie of Reinvention: Correcting Manning Marable's Malcolm X* (Baltimore, 2012). For critiques of what is sometimes called Malcolmology, or the hagiographies of Malcolm X, see Michael Eric Dyson, *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X* (New York, 1995). Compare with Gerald Lyn Early, "Notes on the Invention of Malcolm X," in *The Culture of Bruising: Essays on Prizefighting, Literature, and Modern American Culture*, by Gerald Lyn Early (Hopewell, 1994), 233–52; and Gerald Lyn Early, "Malcolm X and the Failure of Afrocentrism," *ibid.*, 253–58. See also Nell Irvin Painter, "Malcolm X across the Genres," *American Historical Review*, 98 (April 1993), 432–39. For critiques of Malcolm X biographies, compare the bibliographical essays in Louis A. DeCaro Jr., *On the Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X* (New York, 1996), 297–300; and Marable, *Malcolm X*, 489–93. See also Robert E. Terrill, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Malcolm X* (New York, 2010). On the Social Gospel in U.S. history, including the theologian James Cone's invocation of Malcolm X in this tradition, see Gary Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* (West Sussex, 2011), 397–98, 404, 410–11, 570. On the disputed but influential idea that African American religion is a radical freedom discourse, see Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African*

- Americans* (Maryknoll, 1998). For an application of this idea to African American Islamic history, see Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection* (New York, 2005). Sherman A. Jackson argues that early black Islamic movements were “folk-oriented holy protest against anti-black racism.” *Ibid.*, 4.
4. On the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X in terms of the African American engagement with black internationalist, Afro-Asian, African diasporic, and pan-African politics during the Cold War, see Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom beyond America* (Minneapolis, 2012); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, 2000); Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Right Era* (Chapel Hill, 2006); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, 2002); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956–1974* (Cambridge, Mass., 2013); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill, 1996); and Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, 1997). On other African American appropriations of Middle Eastern symbols, literary motifs, objects, and other cultural elements into political protest, social empowerment, economic activity, or cultural innovation during this era, see Robin D. G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012); Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (Chapel Hill, 2014); and Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests*

*in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley, 2001). Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America* (Chicago, 1965), 265–305.

5. For the “my heart is in Cairo” quotation, see Malik El-Shabazz to Muhammad Taufik Oweida, Nov. 30, 1964 (reel 3), Malcolm X Collection. Shabazz departed for the hajj on April 13, 1964, and returned to New York on May 21. He left again, this time for Cairo, on July 9 and did not arrive home until November 24. “Chronology of the Life and Activities of Malcolm X,” *Malcom X: A Research Site*, <http://www.brothermalcolm.net/mxtimeline.html>.
6. For studies that include coverage of Shabazz's contributions to and development inside the Nation of Islam, see Clayborne Carson, *Malcolm X: The FBI File* (New York, 1991); DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*; Michael A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (New York, 2005); Bruce Perry, *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed Black America* (Barrytown, 1991); and Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Bloomington, 2003). Hollis Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832–1912* (London, 1967). Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race* (London, 1887). On Dusé Mohamed Ali, see Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation*, 48–77; and Ian Duffield, “Some American Influences on Dusé Mohammed Ali,” in *Pan-African Biography*, ed. Robert A. Hill (Los Angeles, 1987), 11–56. On the idea that Islam nurtured black political self-determination, see Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (New York, 2010), 165–227. While questions about the Nation of Islam's legitimacy as an Islamic religious group remain a fixture in various discourses, many specialists in the study of Islam in America have argued that the Nation of Islam should be understood as

part of the history of Islamic religion's development in the United States. See Edward E. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960–1975* (Chapel Hill, 2006); GhaneaBassiri, *History of Islam in America*; Zareena Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (New York, 2014); Aminah Beverly McCloud, *African American Islam* (New York, 1995); and Juliane Hammer and Omid Safi, eds., *Cambridge Companion to American Islam* (New York, 2013).

7. On the establishment and postwar growth of the Nation of Islam, see Claude Andrew Clegg III, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (New York, 1997); Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam*; E. U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* (Chicago, 1962); Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Durham, N.C., 1996); and C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Grand Rapids, 1994). Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, 174. On how the Nation of Islam became a radical symbol of anti-Americanism, see Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam*, 127–30. DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 123–24, esp. 123.
8. On the Afro-Asian Conference, see Marable, *Malcolm X*, 119–20; and Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, 167–70. On Shabazz's meaning in the larger context of postwar black liberation, see George M. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York, 1995), 278–84. Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 258, 257–66. Clegg, *Original Man*, 135–36, 189. On the impact of Nasser's role in the Suez crisis on African Americans, see Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 255–65.



9. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 131. Shabazz's speeches from this period until his death bear the mark of these multiple influences. See Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary: Speeches, Interviews, and a Letter*, ed. George Breitman (New York, 1970); Benjamin Goodman, ed., *The End of White World Supremacy: Four Speeches by Malcolm X* (New York, 1971); Steve Clark, ed., *February 1965: The Final Speeches* (New York, 1992); George Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X: The Evolution of a Revolutionary* (New York, 1967); Malcolm X, *Malcolm X on Afro-American History* (New York, 1990); Bruce Perry, ed., *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches* (New York, 1970); George Breitman, *Malcolm X: The Man and His Ideas* (New York, 1965); and Steve Clark, ed., *Malcolm X Talks to Young People: Speeches in the United States, Britain, and Africa* (New York, 2002).  
DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, esp. 123–24.
10. Lincoln, *Black Muslims in America*, esp. 225, 143; Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 261.
11. Clegg, *Original Man*, 124; DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 138–39; Gomez, *Black Crescent*, 350; Marable, *Malcolm X*, 165–67; Lincoln, *Black Muslims in America*, 226; Perry, *Malcolm*, 206.
12. New York SAC to FBI Director, memo, July 29, 1969, file no. 100-399321, Malcolm Little hq File 5, p. 16, *FBI Records: The Vault*, <http://vault.fbi.gov/malcolm-little-malcolm-x/malcolm-little-malcolm-x-hq-file-05-of-27/view>. “Arabs Send Warm Greetings to ‘Our Brothers’ of Color in U.S.A.,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Aug. 15, 1959, p. 1.
13. For Shabazz's framing of race in the Arab world, see Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 268. Emily Jane O'Dell, “X Marks the Spot: Mapping Malcolm X's Encounters with Sudan,” *Journal of Africana Religions*, 3 (Jan. 2015), 96–115.

14. For the “black poodle” quotation, see Sunni M. Khalid, “The Root: Race and Racism Divide Egypt,” *NPR*, <http://www.npr.org/2011/02/07/133562448/the-root-egypts-race-problem>. Alex Haley and Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York, 1973), 342. Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon*, 1–44.
15. Malcolm X, *End of White Supremacy*, ed. Goodman, 71. The idea that the religion of Islam was by definition a religion of liberation was laid out most forcefully in Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*.
16. DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 201. Larry Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West: Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion to Islam* (New York, 1992). Because the Nation of Islam was by far the most prominent Muslim group in the postwar United States and Malcolm X was its most popular and media-savvy spokesperson, both the organization and he became targets of federal surveillance and counterintelligence, media scrutiny, scholarly study, and missionary competition. On media (mis)interpretations of the Nation of Islam, see Sean McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe: Exotics, Subversives, and Journalists, 1955–1993* (Chapel Hill, 2004), 55–94. Malcolm X, “Malcolm X Speaks,” letter to the editor, *New York Amsterdam News*, Nov. 24, 1962, p. 39; Malcolm X, “Muslim Teachings,” letter to the editor, *New York Times Magazine*, Aug. 25, 1963, p. 2; Malcolm X, *Malcolm X: Speeches at Harvard*, ed. Archie Epps (New York, 1991), 118–25.
17. DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 201; Hans Mahnig, “Islam in Switzerland: Fragmented Accommodation in a Federal Country,” in *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (New York, 2001), 75–76.

18. DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, esp. 163; FBI file 100-399321, sec. 9, May 23, 1963, in Carson, *Malcolm X*, 237. On Malcolm X's shifting sense of moral geography, see Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country*, 107–20. Haley and Malcolm X, *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 325, 350, 368.
19. Charles Igram to Members of the Federation of Islamic Associations in the United States and Canada, Jan. 7, 1964 (in Edward E. Curtis IV's possession); Marc Ferris, “To ‘Achieve the Pleasure of Allah’: Immigrant Muslims in New York City, 1893–1991,” in *Muslim Communities in North America*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany, 1994), 215; Perry, *Malcolm*, 261–64; DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 202–3. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 301.
20. Yaacov Shimoni, *Political Dictionary of the Arab World* (New York, 1987), 105–6. Islamism was not then and is not now the sole property of any one party or organization. It can take many governmental forms and express differing political goals. See Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World* (Ann Arbor, 2008). For the idea that Islam offered resources for political action and governance, see Ralph M. Coury, *The Making of an Egyptian Nationalist: The Early Years of Azzam Pasha, 1893–1936* (Reading, 1998). Abd al-Rahman Azzam, *The Eternal Message of Muhammad*, trans. Caesar E. Farah (Cambridge, Eng., 1993), 94.
21. Haley and Malcolm X, *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 327. On the intervention of the Abd al-Rahman Azzam and the Saudi government on behalf of Shabazz, see *ibid.*, 325–48; DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 205–7; and Marable, *Malcolm X*, 308–9.
22. Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955–1967* (Boulder, 1984). Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War, 1958–1964:*

- A Study of Ideology in Politics* (London, 1965), 21–22, 53; Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven, 1977); Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (New York, 2000).
23. Reinhard Schulze, *Islamischer Internationalismus im 20. Jahrhundert: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Islamischen Weltliga* (Islamic internationalism in the twentieth century: Studies on the history of the Muslim World League) (Leiden, 1990); Reinhard Schulze, “Institutionalization,” in *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (6 vols., New York, 1995), I, 346–501; Reinhard Schulze, “Muslim World League,” *ibid.*, III, 208–10.
24. Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (London, 2002), 174, 152.
25. On the Saudis' expedited plan, see Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dār al-Ifṭā* (Leiden, 1997), 189. Schulze, *Islamischer Internationalismus im 20. Jahrhundert*; Schulze, “Institutionalization,” 346–50; Schulze, “Muslim World League,” 208–10; Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (Oxford, 1990).
26. Malcolm X, “Appeal to African Heads of State,” in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. George Breitman (New York, 1990), 72–77, esp. 75, 76.
27. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 330–31; DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 241. Malcolm X Diary, July–Sept. 1964. Most of the correspondence between Akbar Muhammad and Shabazz in the Malcolm X Collection occurred when both of them were still associated with the Nation of Islam. Most of Muhammad's letters were written when he was in Cairo. See letters from Sept. 20, Nov. 6, Nov. 11, 1961, April 26, 1962, Feb. 3, March 14 (from

Zanzibar), July 28, 1963, Nov. 9, 1964, in “Correspondence” (reel 3), Malcolm X Collection.

28. Selma Botman, *Egypt from Independence to Revolution, 1919–1952* (Syracuse, 1991), 116; Heather J. Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton, 2008), 333, 334, 338, 340, 420.
29. Shabazz sometimes deviated from his written remarks, and he was talented as a debater and extemporaneous speaker. Unless otherwise stated, this article favors what is recorded in Shabazz's handwritten diaries because (1) they seem to be reliable historical documents; (2) they provide an unprecedented look into Shabazz's development as a thinker; and (3) reading all of the diary entries together renders a more coherent picture of Shabazz's thought. Malcolm X Diary, July 1964.
30. *ibid.*
31. *ibid.*
32. *Ibid.* For the “moral responsibility” quotation, see DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 239. Emphasis in original. Malcolm X, “Letters from Abroad,” *Malcolm X Speaks*, ed. Breitman, 61–62.
33. DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 33–37, 269–70. For evidence of the appeal of Nasserism as a legitimately Islamic ideology, see John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, 1998), 134; and Daniel Crecelius, “The Cause of Secularism in Modern Egypt,” in *Islam and Development*, ed. John L. Esposito (Syracuse, 1980), 234n30.
34. Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo, “Mapping Islamic Actors in Egypt,” March 2012, <http://media.leidenuniv.nl/legacy/mapping-islamic-actors—version-2.2.pdf>, p. 36.

- Shabazz recorded the number of different countries represented as 74, while Marable says it was 93. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 364. Malcolm X Diary, Aug. 1964.
35. Haley and Malcolm X, *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 357. Malcolm X Diary, Aug. 2, 1964.
36. Malcolm X Diary, Aug. 2, 1964.
37. *Ibid.*, Sept. 22, 1964. Schulze, *Modern History of the Islamic World*, 173. Perry, *Malcolm*, 322; DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 239–41.
38. On these visits and Shabazz's return home, see reels 3 and 9, Malcolm X Collection.
39. El-Shabazz to Muhammad Sarur al-Sabban, Nov. 30, 1964 (reel 3), Malcolm X Collection.
40. *ibid.*
41. El-Shabazz to Oweida, Nov. 30, 1964, *ibid.*
42. Malcolm X Diary, April 29, April 30, 1964. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 312.
43. “We Are Fighting for Respect and Recognition as Human Beings for All Black Americans: Answers to Questions by ‘Al-Muslimoon,’ February 13–20, 1965,” in *February 1965*, ed. Clark, 284.
44. For an orientation to the political dimensions of U.S. religion, see Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States* (Lanham, 2011). The idea that the United States is at heart a secular country has been critiqued in many places, including Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton, 2007). The miracle motif is also part of modern Christianity's race relations theories. See Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York,

- 2000). Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America* (New Haven, 2011), 69; John L. Esposito, "Contemporary Islam: Reformation or Revolution?," in *Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York, 1999), 667. Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York, 2005), 2–3.
45. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 329. "Educate Our People in the Science of Politics: Ford Auditorium, Detroit, February 14, 1965," in *February 1965*, ed. Clark, 104; "Not Just an American Problem, but a World Problem: Corn Hill Methodist Church, Rochester, February 16, 1965," *ibid.*, 182; "Elijah Is Willing to Wait—I'm Not: Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama, February 3, 1965," *ibid.*, 22.
46. Roxanne L. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton, 2006), 16, 13. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 9, 10.
47. The story of how these Islamic movements were similar to and different from other black power groups is one yet to be told. Among the questions to be answered is how these different movements interpreted the legacy of the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X, even the groups that were not Islamic in nature. See John H. Bracey Jr. and Sharon Harley, eds., "Part 3: Papers of the Revolutionary Action Movement, 1962–1996," in *The Black Power Movement* (microfilm, 17 reels, University Publications of America, 2003), available at Lexis-Nexus Academic Universe. For an account that weaves the Nation of Islam into the story of black power, see William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975* (Chicago, 1992). On African American Muslim groups, see R. H. Mukhtar Curtis, "Urban Muslims: The Formation of the Dar ul-Islam Movement," in *Muslim Communities in North America*,

- ed. Haddad and Smith, 51–73; McCloud, *African American Islam*, 64–72; Robert Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (New York, 2002), 65–70; Lawrence H. Mamiya, “African-American Muslims,” in *Encyclopedia of Muslim-American History*, ed. Edward E. Curtis IV (2 vols., New York, 2010), I, 17; Khalid Fattah Griggs, “Islamic Party in North America: A Quiet Storm of Political Activism,” in *Muslim Minorities in the West: Visible and Invisible*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith (Lanham, 2002), 77–106; and Khalid Fattah Griggs, *Come Let Us Change This World: A Brief History of the Islamic Party of North America, 1971–1991* (Winston-Salem, 2007). Mamiya, “African-American Muslims,” 15; Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, 68–69.
48. Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism* (New York, 1971), 222; Bro. Robert 7X, “Is Carmichael Right in Saying That Islam Not African Religion?,” *Muhammad Speaks*, June 4, 1971, pp. 29–30. Chancellor Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.* (Chicago, 1971). Stephen Howe, *Afrocentrism: Mythical Past and Imagined Homes* (London, 1998), 282. Sylvester A. Johnson, “The Rise of Black Ethnics: The Ethnic Turn in African American Religions, 1916–1945,” *Religion and American Culture*, 20 (Summer 2010), 125–63.
49. Barnor Hesse, “Racialized Modernity: An Analytics of White Mythologies,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30 (July 2007), 643–63; Lewis R. Gordon, *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age* (Lanham, 1997), 53.
50. On how anti-Muslim scholarship in the United States is tied to larger trends in anti-Muslim prejudice and activism, see Carl W. Ernst, ed., *Islamophobia in America: The Anatomy of Intolerance* (New York, 2013); and Wajahat Ali et al., *Fear, Inc.: The Roots*



*of the Islamophobia Network in America* (Washington, 2011), 27–55,

[http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-](http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/08/pdf/islamophobia_chapter2.pdf)

[content/uploads/issues/2011/08/pdf/islamophobia\\_chapter2.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/08/pdf/islamophobia_chapter2.pdf).

51. On the role of marginal religious groups in the making of the American mainstream, see R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York, 1986). On how an international and global approach to U.S. history does not diminish the importance of the nation-state as a unit of historical analysis, see Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 252–54.