



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

*AUTOBIOGRAPHY, PAGE 217:*  
A FEMINIST ENTANGLEMENT WITH MALCOLM X IN  
BEIRUT

by

HELEN HOLT ZUCKERMAN

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To my parents – there's simply no one else who compares.

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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Helen Holt Zuckerman for Master of Arts  
Major: Transnational American Studies

Title: *Autobiography*, page 217: A Feminist Entanglement with Malcolm X in Beirut

On page 217 of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X, as told to Alex Haley*, Malcolm X writes about his experiences in Beirut, his first port of call after his 1964 hajj to Mecca. He dedicates the majority of his page-long description of the city to a screed against the liberty and boldness of the Europeanized women he writes of seeing on the streets of Beirut, and immediately connects the public appearance of young women with the moral virtues, or lack thereof, of a nation. This passage taken at face value would be fascinating in and of itself. But the collaborative writing process between Malcolm X and Alex Haley, both major figures in 20<sup>th</sup> African-American literature and history with very different politics, was so complicated and contentious that the *Autobiography* cannot be read as a simple narrative of Malcolm's life. Black feminist scholars in particular have grappled with the legacy left to them by Malcolm X and by those who represent him. Their efforts have sometimes attacked, venerated, critiqued and honored him – sometimes all at once.

This project then is broadly concerned with two engagements between Malcolm X and feminism: firstly, how gender, women, and proto-feminism informed Malcolm's life and politics, and secondly, how black feminist scholars after his death have reckoned with his legacy. A close examination of Malcolm's multiple visits to Lebanon offers a crucial perspective into the development of Malcolm's thinking about gender and feminism. Malcolm, encountering Lebanon as the liminal threshold of reentry from the transformative rituals of his hajj to Mecca, falls back on Orientalist tropes of Arab women to symbolically preserve his political and spiritual geography, constructed with Saudi Arabia representing the moral ideal and the United States as its nadir.

Malcolm was preoccupied with both critiquing the evils of Western constructs of modernity – colonialism, racism, capitalism –and also with promoting the Arab world and Africa as models of successful countermodernity. By reading his travel diaries and the first-person accounts of the people who met him on his two Lebanese visits, a richer and more complicated entanglement emerges. Malcolm's experiences in Lebanon were far broader and broader-minded than the *Autobiography* suggests, but his persistent ventriloquizing of the standard Orientalist tropes about women and gender remains a barrier to his larger project of a black movement of countermodernity and third world solidarity, as well as struggle for black feminist scholarship.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

On April 29, 1964, Malcolm X, the African-American activist, organizer, leader, preacher, and writer disembarked from the plane that had picked him up after his hajj and deposited him in Beirut, Lebanon. This would be his first of two trips to Lebanon in the last twelve months of his life. Malcolm was only in Beirut for four days, including both trips, and out of these two trips, he wrote a just single page about his experiences, conflating it into one trip, in his *Autobiography*. Yet he did visit, he did write, and he made friendships there that would continue for the brief remainder of his life. The account of Malcolm X's experience of Lebanon that he gives in Chapter Seventeen of his *Autobiography* is in direct contradiction to the historical records of his trip, or rather his multiple trips, to Beirut in 1964. In the *Autobiography*, he fixates on the appearance on Lebanese women. He writes:

“In Beirut's Palm Beach Hotel, I luxuriated in my first long sleep since I had left America. Then, I went walking-fresh from weeks in the Holy Land: immediately my attention was struck by the mannerisms and attire of the Lebanese women. In the Holy Land, there had been the very modest, very feminine Arabian women-and there was this sudden contrast of the half-French, half-Arab Lebanese women who projected in their dress and street manners more liberty, more boldness. I saw clearly the obvious European influence upon the Lebanese culture. It showed me how any country's moral strength, or its moral weakness, is quickly measurable by the street attire and attitude of its women-especially its young women. Wherever the spiritual values have been submerged, if not destroyed, by an emphasis upon the material things, invariably, the women reflect it. Witness the women, both young and old, in America-where scarcely any moral values are left. There seems in most countries to be either one extreme or the



other. Truly a paradise could exist wherever material progress and spiritual values could be properly balanced.”<sup>1</sup>

His contemporaries and modern scholars have struggled to understand Malcolm’s relationships to gender, to women, and to feminism, and this particular paragraph offers much to confound and to inform those discourses. In this paper, I hope to offer a complexification of a prevailing feminist theory that the pan-African, pan-Islamic internationalist change in Malcolm’s ideology put him on a more progressive path regarding gender.

Malcolm wrote of “the obvious European influence on Lebanese culture” in 1964, and of the “half-French, half-Arab Lebanese women” who dressed and acted with “more liberty, and more boldness” than their counterparts with whom he had interacted in hajj in Saudi Arabia. He wrote that “a country’s moral strength, or it’s moral weakness, is quickly measurable by the street attire and attitude of its women,” in his book, co-written with and edited by Alex Haley, that went to print in 1965. And yet by the end of 1964, he spoke at a press conference in Paris, saying “One thing I became aware of in my traveling recently through Africa and the Middle East, in every country you go to, usually the degree of progress can never be separated from the woman. If you’re in a country that’s progressive, the woman is progressive. But in every backward country you’ll find the women are backward. . . . So one of the things I became thoroughly convinced of in my recent travels is the importance of giving freedom to the woman. And I am frankly proud of the contributions our women have made in the struggle for freedom and I’m one person who’s for giving them all the leeway possible because they’ve made a greater contribution than

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X, as told to Alex Haley* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 217.

many of us men.”<sup>2</sup>

This striking development in his thought over the last year of his life – the year in which he broke with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, went on hajj, founded the short-lived Muslim Mosque Inc. and the Organization of African-American Unity, and was assassinated – has been a crucial focus point for black feminist scholarship on his life and legacy.

Malcolm X, encountering Lebanon as the liminal threshold of reentry after his transformative hajj to Mecca, falls back on Orientalist tropes of Arab women – both Saudi Arabian women and Lebanese women – to symbolically preserve the political imaginary he had built with Saudi Arabia as its moral ideal and the United States as its moral nadir. Malcolm writes about the world, about Mecca and Egypt and Nigeria and Ghana, but he’s talking about America, or at least talking about America as well. When he critiques Lebanese women, there is an embedded critique of the United States. When he writes like this about Lebanese women, his words contrast bluntly with his descriptions of the powerful feelings of brotherhood that he experienced in Mecca. He wrote:

“I reflected many, many times to myself upon how the American Negro has been entirely brainwashed from ever seeing or thinking of himself, as he should, as a part of the non-white peoples of the world. The American Negro has no conception of the hundreds of millions of other non-whites' concern for him: he has no conception of their feeling of brotherhood for and with him.”<sup>3</sup>

Discovering this feeling of brotherhood was of inestimable importance for Malcolm and his projects of “third world” solidarity. But when he says “brotherhood,” and then on

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<sup>2</sup> Erik S. McDuffie and Komozi Woodard, “‘If you’re in a country that’s progressive, the woman is progressive,” *Biography*, vol. 36, no. 3, (Summer 2013): 527, accessed April 12, 2015. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/bio.2013.0036.527>

<sup>3</sup> X and Haley, *Autobiography*, 216

the very next page criticizes the liberty and the boldness of Lebanese women, it is clear he is referring to a literal brotherhood of men. His radical vision failed in this respect; not only did it fail to make a space for “third world” women as anything but placeholders for ideology, it also failed to recognize the liberatory potential that could have been realized through solidarity with those bold, liberal, Lebanese women.

Both Lebanon and Saudi Arabia were interesting places to be in 1964. If Malcolm encountered each of these places at a particularly relevant point in his own history, so too did the politics and history of each nation affect his encounter with them. Saudi Arabia, which Malcolm refers to freely as “The Holy Land” and simply “Arabia” without the identification to the Ibn Saud family, is depoliticized in Malcolm’s rendering of it and made into a realm of (almost) excessive spirituality and purity. Women there are, in his judgment, “very modest and very feminine” and “Arabian,” and occupy a higher place in his moral geography than the bold, liberal women of Beirut, or even the women of the United States.

Lebanon in 1964 stood close to the beginning of the end of its so-called “golden age.” Lebanon was 50 years free of Ottoman occupation, and the French Mandate had been officially dissolved in 1948. The southern border with Israel was, for the moment, quiet. A flourishing economy had swung in after WWII and was still afloat. Marlon Brando sailed his yacht into the marina of the northern city of Byblos, Brigitte Bardot wore Yves Saint Laurent to visit the Roman ruins of Baalbek, and Beirut received its moniker “the

Paris of the Middle East” from the Western press<sup>4</sup>. In 1958 however, six years before Malcolm’s visit, American imperial power had made itself felt in Lebanon. At the bidding of then-president Camille Chamoun, five thousand US Marines landed on the Beirut beach of Ramlet el Baida to intervene in an electoral crisis that threatened Chamoun’s government.

After the crisis, Fuad Chehab’s government was formed and maintained power until 1964, although Chamoun’s six-year term “would remain the golden-era in the collective memory of the people of Beirut.”<sup>5</sup> In that year, a general election was held, with voting extending from the 5<sup>th</sup> of April to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May. Evidently, this major political event was nearing its fraught conclusion during the days Malcolm was in Lebanon. This election is of particular significance because there was significant popular demand for a constitutional amendment that would have allowed Chehab to extend his presidential term; all this acclaim he refused, and backed a protégé of his, Charles Helou, into the presidency<sup>6</sup>. Crisis would begin to materialize in 1967 under Helou’s government, with the Israeli war and the influx of displaced Palestinian refugees. These events, among many others, would sow the seeds of the devastating Lebanese civil war which erupted in 1975 and whose end date is contested but generally hovers around 1995. This civil war was soon followed by war with Israel and an Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon that would last until 2000. So it is possible to look back in hindsight and see that in 1964, Lebanon stood on the threshold of a cataclysmic phase of its own history; a liminal poise before the crash of civil war.

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<sup>4</sup> Samir Kassir, *Beirut*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 408

<sup>5</sup> Kassir, *Beirut*, 358

<sup>6</sup> Kassir, *Beirut*, 360

We may now turn to Saudi Arabia which, as noted earlier, is warmly depoliticized in Malcolm's depiction. Saudi Arabia was officially united as one kingdom in 1932, by Abdulaziz Ibn Saud after his successful campaigns of conquest across the Arabian peninsula. The all-important oil fields were discovered by representatives of the Standard Oil of California in 1938, and by 1941, the contracts for the wells had been given to the Arabian-American Oil Company, known by 1944 as Aramco, had arrived to develop and exploit the phenomenal resources of the Saudi Arabian deserts, importing its American system of Jim Crow racial hierarchies of labor and exploitation.<sup>7</sup> Prince Saud bin Abdulaziz, the second king of Saudi Arabia, inherited from his father in 1953, only to be deposed by his own brother, Faisal, in 1964. The keen reader will remember that this was the year of the Lebanese elections, and of course of Malcolm's hajj. King Saud left the Saudi Arabia seeking medical treatment in Europe in 1963, and Faisal took advantage of his absence to consolidate power for his own successful bid for the throne in November of 1964. His modernist economic regime was moderately popular until his assassination in 1975 by his nephew, Faisal bin Musaid ibn Abdulaziz.<sup>8</sup>

1964 then was a year that saw elections – or handovers of power, at least - in governments in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the United States, with an incumbent Lyndon Johnson decisively defeating Barry Goldwater for the presidency in November. Earlier that year, Johnson had officially declared his “War on Poverty” in his first State of the Union address, and a jury delivered a mistrial decision for the murderer of black civil rights

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 90

<sup>8</sup> Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 246

activist Medgar Evers. In February, Muhammad Ali won his historic victory against Sonny Liston, an event of profound significance for the Nation of Islam, as Ali would rise to fill Malcolm's in the spotlight as a celebrity black Muslim after Malcolm's break with the Nation only a month later. After giving his now-famous "The Ballot or Bullet" speech, Malcolm embarked for his hajj.<sup>9</sup>

It is at that point, directly after the hajj, that Malcolm arrived in Lebanon and that this paper will pick up the threads of his both formative experiences of gender and his legacy to the scholars and artists who have succeeded him. In a 2005 essay for *Souls*, Manning Marable, Malcolm's most recent biographer, asks several provocative questions about the received legacy of Malcolm X; questions with which this paper too hopes to engage. "Was Malcolm's *hajj* to Mecca in April 1964 the dramatic turning point of the *Autobiography*, the glorious epiphany Malcolm claimed it was at the time, and that virtually all other interpreters of him have uncritically accepted?" Marable asks. If we did not peer below the surface, Marable prods, "there would be no need to adjust the crafted image we have learned to adore, frozen in time. We could simply all find enduring comfort in the safe, masculinist gaze of our 'Black shining prince.'"<sup>10</sup> Such comforts, through a feminist analysis, are of small endurance, and so we will peer more closely at Malcolm X in Beirut.

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<sup>9</sup> George Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 110.

<sup>10</sup> Manning Marable, "Rediscovering Malcolm's Life: A Historian's Adventures in Living History." *Souls*, vol.7, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 21, accessed March 23, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10999940590910023>

## CHAPTER II

### THE INTRICACIES OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

It is surely the rare life that can neatly be turned into narrative. Malcolm X's life was no doubt the exception in a great many ways, but his Autobiography is as complicated a document as the life it relates. Mediated through his "autobiographer" Alex Haley, through fifty intervening years, through Spike Lee's 1992 hit biopic, and refracted through the memories of people who shared moments of Malcolm's life with him, the book must not be taken as the definitive source of Malcolm's life and thought. Manning Marable's recent magisterial *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* has done much to address gaps and obfuscations in the Autobiography, and to complicate and enrich the history of Malcolm X. However, Marable's book devotes even less attention to Lebanon than the Autobiography does, leaving another gap through which we may examine the brief encounter of Beirut and Malcolm X. My concern is specifically with the single printed page he devoted to Beirut, Lebanon, page 217 in the original edition, in Chapter 17, entitled "El Hajj Malik el-Shabazz."

#### **A. First-Hand Accounts of Malcolm X in Beirut**

I will be analyzing five distinct accounts of Malcolm's trips to Beirut, one in April 1964 and one in September 1964, all of which present tantalizingly differing versions of his movements and activities. First is his account of it as told to Alex Haley and as published in the Autobiography – Malcolm and Haley devoted no more than a single page to Beirut in the entire book. Second is Malcolm's own travel diary of the trip, covering three days in

April and single day in September. The third is the account of Dr. Malik Badri, a Sudanese scholar who had met Malcolm in Khartoum in 1959 and by 1964 was teaching at the American University of Beirut and who hosted Malcolm socially and academically during his April trip. Fourth will be the account of Azizah al-Hibri, who in 1964 was an AUB student and activist and acted as Malcolm's university host for his September visit. Finally, Manning Marable's treatment addresses the April and September visits in a just few paragraphs, but with detailed attention on Malcolm's encounters and conversations.

We must turn first to Malcolm's famous Autobiography, as told to Alex Haley. This document, which has been a bestseller and a banned book, is highly mediated both through Haley editing during Malcolm's life and after his death, and through Malcolm's own self-awareness of the value of making a coherent narrative out of his life. It is unusual, after all, to begin work on an autobiography at the age of 38. He writes:

“The last of April, 1964, I flew to Beirut, the seaport capital of Lebanon. A part of me, I left behind in the Holy City of Mecca. And, in turn, I took away with me - forever - a part of Mecca.

I was on my way, now, to Nigeria, then Ghana. But some friends I had made in the Holy Land had urged and insisted that I make some stops en route and I had agreed. For example, it had been arranged that I would first stop and address the faculty and the students at the American University of Beirut.

In Beirut's Palm Beach Hotel, I luxuriated in my first long sleep since I had left America. Then, I went walking-fresh from weeks in the Holy Land: immediately my attention was struck by the mannerisms and attire of the Lebanese women. In the Holy Land, there had been the very modest, very feminine Arabian women - and there was this sudden contrast of the half-French, half-Arab Lebanese women who projected in their dress and street manners more liberty, more boldness. I saw clearly the obvious European influence upon the Lebanese culture. It showed me how any country's moral strength, or its moral weakness, is quickly measurable by the street attire and attitude of its women-especially its young women. Wherever the spiritual values have been submerged, if not destroyed, by an emphasis upon the material things, invariably, the women reflect it. Witness the women, both young and old, in America - where scarcely any moral values are left. There seems in most countries to be either one extreme or the other. Truly a paradise could exist wherever material progress and spiritual values could be



properly balanced.

I spoke at the University of Beirut the truth of the American black man's condition. I've previously made the comment that any experienced public speaker can feel his audience's reactions. As I spoke, I felt the subjective and defensive reactions of the American white students present - but gradually their hostilities lessened as I continued to present the unassailable facts. But the students of African heritage - well, I'll *never* get over how the African displays his emotions.

Later, with astonishment, I heard that the American press carried stories that my Beirut speech caused a "riot." What kind of a riot? I don't know how any reporter, in good conscience, could have cabled that across the ocean. The Beirut *Daily Star* front-page report of my speech mentioned no "riot" - because there was none. When I was done, the African students all but besieged me for autographs; some of them even hugged me. Never have even American Negro audiences accepted me as I have been accepted time and again by the less inhibited, more down-to-earth Africans.

From Beirut, I flew back to Cairo, and there I took a train to Alexandria, Egypt. I kept my camera busy during each brief stopover. Finally I was on a plane to Nigeria."<sup>11</sup>

All of the text of the Autobiography is based on Malcolm's own memories and writings, but as Manning Marable in particular has argued, Alex Haley was more of a collaborator than a mere recorder of Malcolm's words and thoughts. Much of the narrative structure of the book is his; as an author, Haley had a story to tell. Malcolm's diaries are currently controlled by the Shabazz estate and in the collections of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City. Viewable only on microfilm, they present a rare and precious glimpse at Malcolm's own responses to and reflections on his life as he lived it. There is a twining mix of intimacy and self-awareness to the diaries that suggests he was keeping records both for himself and for posterity, or perhaps even for Haley and their Autobiography project. The diary entries for Beirut tell a significantly different story to the Autobiography, starting right from the chronology. In the Autobiography's telling of it, Malcolm spent only a day in Beirut, little more than an

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<sup>11</sup> X and Haley, *Autobiography*, 217

extended layover, and he visited only one time, in April. The diary more accurately represents his itinerary, showing that he was in Beirut from April 29 to May 1 and that returned in September of that year for a single day. The narration of the Autobiography conflates the two trips; he did come first to Beirut directly after completing his hajj in April, but almost none of the events of that visit are recorded in the Autobiography, and the one-day trip with its lecture at AUB was in September of 1964, in the middle of his second, very different trip. The diaries are conversational, full of abbreviations and notations which I have expanded or included respectively below.

“Wed April 29 – I arrived in Beirut about 3 AM, and was in bed by 4:30 AM at the Palm Beach hotel. The porter beat me for an extra tip at the airport, and after the cab driver learned I was a Muslim, his attitude was 100%. He chose the hotel for me. I spent almost an hour reading the papers, out of touch with the “world” for 2 weeks. –

I slept until 9:30 and took my first hot bath since leaving the states. I then wired my wife, and also Hussein after failing to reach him by phone. – They couldn’t locate Splendid Store for me so I set out walking – I met a young chap in a restaurant (who had been to school in America, a EuroAsian) and we walked together. After we got near the vicinity, he departed, and after several inquiries I finally found the store.

When Ibrahim Shiab learned I was a Muslim, after feeling me out carefully, he relaxed a little. After serving coffee and feeling me out some more, he took me home for dinner. We had fish and tomatoes. After dinner we went to the mosque for the Asr prayers. An elderly Imam led the prayer. There were between 20 and 30 others at the mosque. After prayer one of the bros insisted that we stop a few doors away so he could show his friend an American Muslim.

Back at the store, there were two more Muslims who then rode with us to the Jomat Abdul Rahman (Congregation of the Servant of the Merciful God), where we were served coffee and given several pamphlets on Islam. Finally, Sheikh Muhammad Omar Daouk, the general Secretary, came in. He gave me a Yusuf Ali (2 volumes) Quran and this book by [?] and autographed both. – several Nigerians came in who were also returning from the Hajj (two were religious officials) – we left and went to the home of Dr. Malik Badri (whom I had met in Sudan in ’59), who had since gotten his degree in England and was now teaching at the America University at Beirut. He had the prettiest wife and daughter I had ever seen. The three of us (Malik, Ibrahim, and I) talked over coffee. Another Sudanese came in. At prayer time, they took the prayer rug and took turns saying their prayers. I was

ill at ease, not knowing whether to do likewise (take my turn). We talked more and then went to the apartment where about 7 more Sudanese joined us. They were well informed on the Black Muslims and asked many questions on it and the American race problem in general.

Rev Malcolm Boyd had been there recently and had been refused a chance to lecture at the A.U.B. They have scheduled a lecture for me here tomorrow night, April 30 – Thursday I finally got my long distance phone call thru to Hussein in Cairo. He hadn't received my wire yet. – I went to Dr. Malik Badri's house at dinner for dinner with his family – Ibrahim Shiab and --- came in and joined us.

I spoke at the Sudanese Cultural Center to some students and faculty from AUB. It was packed. The white American were subjective and defensive, but later became more submissive. The African students were strongly pro. Two Sudanese sisters present (one was Dr. Badri's wife). One American negro girl stood and attacked me; said I didn't speak for her. Professor Hope's wife made nice remarks – Afterwards I signed many autographs – went to Professor Hope's beautiful Apt, and later to the offices of the Muslim Brothers.

Friday May 1<sup>st</sup>

The Beirut Daily Star carried a front-page article on last night's lecture. – Ibrahim Shiab and --- took me to the airport, where Dr. Malik and others of the Muslim Brotherhood gave me a very touching send-off.”

Both the Splendid Store which was then on bustling Hamra Street, not far from the campus of AUB, and its owner, Ibrahim Shiab, have somehow escaped mention in other narrations of Malcolm's visit to Beirut. He recorded sixteen different names with contact information of people he met in Beirut, ranging from shop-owners to students to professors to government officials, yet not one of these people mentioned by name in the Autobiography. Skipping ahead nearly five months, we come to Malcolm's only other visit to Beirut, for one day in September. He wrote:

“Tues Sept 29<sup>th</sup> ; My plane left Kuwait and arrive in Beirut on schedule. Azizah, the Lebanese student (Nationalist Leader) met me at the airport with about 10 other girl students, all white and American. We went by Prof Hope's home and had 7 Up. Azizah went out, while the rest of us talked, and came back informing us that the Dean had agreed to let me lecture on campus – in just two hours – from 12 to 1 pm. Azizah and I had dinner at the American Embassy cafeteria and then walked to the lecture hall. We had an overflow crowd, with just two hours notice. The students were receptive, their questions objective. There was a cross section represented. Azizah had me driven to the airport, we sat and had ice cream and

talked while waiting for the plane. She wants to do some political writing for an American magazine, to explain the Palestine Question – doesn't want to marry until she has developed her own personality, thinks marriage would hamper it. Dr. Malik Badri was arriving from the Sudan on the same plane I was taking. He greeted me very warmly – I spent an hour in the Cairo airport, in transit, so I couldn't contact anyone – I arrived in Khartoum at 8 pm, had dinner and went to bed after. [passage obscured]...very impressed when they learned I was an American Muslim. They aren't ashamed of black here, nor of using the word.

Mrs. Hope in Beirut seemed "concerned" (and expressed it openly) at my "going into Africa and stirring up all the Africans against the USA" – she lauded my "natural leadership qualities" and my ability to "stir up both whites and blacks" and insisted that I should be doing this in America to arouse the Americans – but arousing the Africans would only cause more trouble.

The Egyptian football team came from Cairo to Khartoum on the same plane and were very friendly – they received a big reception at the airport."

The third written account of Malcolm's time in Beirut is by Dr. Malik Badri himself, who appears quite often in Malcolm's diaries, though he is never mentioned in conjunction with Beirut in the Autobiography. They had met during Malcolm's 1959 trip to Sudan. Malcolm had been strongly influenced by Badri's insistence on "Islam in its pure *tawhidic* nature," though he records that he "did not attack [Malcolm's] deviant beliefs." Badri hosted Malcolm in Khartoum and took him to Omdurman, where Malcolm made good use of his ever-present camera to document his trip and perhaps, as Badri suggests he wished, "to prove to his black people in the States that the Africans were not the primitive uncivilized race that the white Americans wanted the blacks to believe at the time." Badri's own account of Malcolm's visit to Beirut diverges from both the Autobiography and Malcolm's journals, and fills in some anecdotal details.

"When he converted to true Islam and performed his famous Hajj, he met some Sudanese in Makkah who told him that I was teaching in the American University of Beirut. To visit me, he immediately changed his flight route to New York to stop in Beirut instead of Casablanca. One afternoon in 1964 the phone in my flat rang. It was the deep golden voice with the American accent that I had known in the Sudan. "This is Malik El-Shabazz," the voice said. "You mean Brother Malcolm X?" I asked in an excited voice. "It is him," the voice answered.

He told me that he did not like Beirut and that he changed his flight route only to visit me. After eating and relaxing in my house, I urged him to speak in the American University. He reluctantly agreed.

To obtain permission for his talk, I first spoke to the head of my Department, Professor Habib Kurani, a Lebanese Christian. He advised me to speak to the Dean of Faculty of Arts and Science, Professor Hananiyya, another Christian Arab. The Dean said that Malcolm X was a controversial celebrity and that I must seek permission from the Vice-President, Professor Fuad Sarruf, a third Lebanese Christian. The Vice-President said he would speak to the American President of the University. The answer came quickly from the President. It was related to me that the campus of the University is an American ground and that Malcolm was an enemy of America and so he cannot speak in campus.

I informed my Muslim colleagues and we decided that he should speak in the Sudan Cultural Centre on Abdul Aziz Street, which was then only a few blocks from the University. The Sudanese Cultural Attaché, not knowing much about Malcolm, readily agreed. Muslim students put notices all over the campus declaring the occasion. In the evening the place was so packed with people that the organizers had to put loud speakers in Abdul Aziz street for the audience outside the building and the police had to send officers to deal with the traffic congestion in that busy street.

I have not seen an orator who molds the feelings of his listeners as though they were a piece of plasticine in his professional hands. He made the students so angry that one of them slammed a white man sitting in the back seats of the auditorium because he whispered a negative remark about Malcolm. The incident could have ended in collective violence, had it not been for Malcolm's skill in cooling the situation with his unusual wit. An otherwise submissive and soft-spoken wife of a black professor of engineering was so aroused that she loudly and aggressively enumerated the bad treatment her husband received from the white Americans just because of the color of his skin. While some were tearful, he would crack a joke and they, like little children, would laugh with their tears still wetting their eyes and cheeks. The warm and enthusiastic manner by which he had been received in Beirut, changed his attitude towards the city. And after his historic lecture in the Sudan Cultural Centre, the American University took a wiser decision to allow him to speak in campus during his next visit to Beirut."

One of the fascinating details that emerges from Badri's account of Malcolm's aborted lecture at AUB is the implication of the religious and political complexities of Lebanon in 1964. That Badri remembers and mentions the religious sect of each of the faculty members with whom he had to negotiate permission for Malcolm to speak, and that each of those faculty members was Christian, reminds the reader that Lebanon was very

different from the homogeneous cultural experiences Malcolm had had in Saudi Arabia and in Egypt. Both of these countries have vast Muslim majorities, and on the hajj Malcolm had of course been entirely surrounded by Muslims, bringing him to stirring feelings of a broad human brotherhood and solidarity. Lebanon, which would erupt into a religiously-divided civil war in only ten years' time, was a very different landscape; long before its inception as a nation-state, it had been both blessed by the balance of religious plurality and cursed by repeated outbursts of sectarian violence. Badri reports that the official cancellation of Malcolm's talk came directly from Norman Burns, the president at the time, who was an American Christian. Having emerged from the homogeneous brotherhood of the hajj, Malcolm plunged straight into a fraught arena of political, religious, and nationalist affiliations with competing interests and complicated relationships to Malcolm himself, to Islam, to Black Muslims, and to black nationalism.

The fourth first-person account of Malcolm's visit to Beirut is from Azizah al-Hibri and describes his second visit in September 1964. Al-Hibri herself was focus of Malcolm's journal entry about this brief visit, rather than the lecture, about which he wrote only a few sentences. Badri notes that the American University of Beirut had wisely decided to allow Malcolm to speak on campus when they were offered a second chance, but that wisdom was, according to al-Hibri, the result of her and other student activists' pressure at the time rather than any enlightenment on the part of the administration. Al-Hibri's recollections have been variously published in scholarly and magazine articles, and her end of their subsequent correspondence remains in her private collection. As recorded by Alex Lubin in a special Malcolm X memorial edition of the *Journal of Africana Religions*, al-Hibri recalls, "I was the president of the [debating] society at the time and I kept after the Dean

of Students, Dean Arnold, until he gave his permission about an hour before the arrival of Malcolm and the scheduled speech which he gave at Dodge Hall at noon. Standing room only. Topic: Imperialism and Oil as a weapon of liberation for Third World Countries.”<sup>12</sup>

Al-Hibri had been only marginally familiar with Malcolm X until very shortly before his invitation to AUB by the debating society. In a 2012 interview with *East of the River Magazine* she explained that “when the European American Rev. Malcolm Boyd, an earlier speaker at her college, joked about being known in the U.S. Civil Rights movement as ‘Malcolm Y,’”<sup>13</sup> she was introduced to Malcolm X’s work. She was consequently surprised “administrators objected that he was ‘airing U.S. dirty laundry abroad’ and denied permission for the speech.”<sup>14</sup> Taking a “freedom of speech” tack in her argument, al-Hibri certainly earned her place as president of the debating society and convinced the dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences not to cancel the scheduled talk. She and the rest of the society sprung into action to advertise the talk with only an hour’s warning and Malcolm arrived to a standing-room only crowd; in his diary he describes it as overflowing. Al-Hibri remembers his talk as a “fiery, visionary” speech, following which they went for lunch together. The tape of the speech, the only known record of it, apparently disappeared while Malcolm and al-Hibri in the brief hours between the conclusion of the speech and Malcolm’s late afternoon flight out of Beirut. Al-Hibri accompanied him to the airport. where, she recollects, he tried to give her a few Lebanese

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<sup>12</sup> Alex Lubin, “Between the Secular and the Sectarian,” *Journal Of Africana Religions*, vol. 3, no. 1 (January 2015): 92, accessed January 16, 2015. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/oar.2015.0000>.

<sup>13</sup> Virginia Avniel Spatz, “New Words from Malcolm X,” *East of the River Magazine*, July 2012, 48.

<sup>14</sup> Spatz, “New Words from Malcolm X,” 49.

coins he still, as he would have no further use for them. Al-Hibri demurred, so Malcolm diplomatically used the coins to buy ice cream for them both as they continued their conversation. Al-Hibri and her dreams and ambitions take up most of Malcolm's journal entry for the September visit, and their correspondence which lasted for the next five months until Malcolm's death, was warm and friendly. "I was a kid in his eyes," al-Hibri says of their meeting. "He was a grown man, a seasoned statesman and Civil Rights leader. I was a college student." In the same magazine article, she admits to having had "little knowledge of U.S. racial politics and few pre-conceived ideas about the speaker she was hosting."<sup>15</sup>

Al-Hibri admits to having a hard time reconciling the media's portrait with the friendly, encouraging man she had met in Beirut. Al-Hibri suggests that Malcolm's sincere interest in her ideas and her politics was that of a man ahead of his time, who saw in a young Muslim woman the potential for radical leadership. In a book he inscribed to her, he wrote "You have and are everything it takes to create a NEW world – leadership is needed among women as well as among men – and you have all of the qualities it takes to make people and things move." He signed it, and all his letters to her, Brother Malcolm.

It seems not too great a leap to say that the Malcolm X who could interact like this with the young Azizah al-Hibri is troublingly incongruous with the Malcolm X in the Autobiography who believes that the street attire of young Lebanese women suggests the moral decay of the country.

The fifth and final account of Malcolm's Beirut trips comes from Manning Marable's exhaustively-research *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*. Marable and his

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<sup>15</sup> Spatz, "New Words from Malcolm X," 48.



researchers read the diaries and all the associated first-hand literature very closely, but treat Beirut as a minor stop on Malcolm's powerful hajj and subsequent travels, as it was in purely chronological terms. Marable adds the salient information that "part of [Malcolm's] agenda in Beirut was to become acquainted with Lebanon's Muslim Brotherhood organization, which was dedicated to directing the tenets of Islam to political ends."<sup>16</sup> Malcolm's interest in the Muslim Brotherhood, which was relatively newly established in Lebanon, was not only or perhaps not even primarily religious in nature, Marable argues, but rather for its aim of establishing some sort of pan-Islamic political movement. The Brotherhood's project in that respect represented an interesting model for Malcolm's own nascent project of a black national with a strong Muslim foundation. Marable goes on to describe Malcolm's meeting with Malik Badri and the hospitality and "touching sendoff" he received from Badri and the other members of the Brotherhood.

Before Malcolm's return to Beirut on September 29<sup>th</sup>, Marable writes that he "tried unsuccessfully to obtain official financial support for the Muslim Mosque International from the foreign secretary" of Kuwait during a brief stop. Here Marable's account begins to differ with Malcolm's own travel diary. Marable reports that Azizah al-Hibri and "about ten white American students" – Malcolm makes a point in his diary to record that they were all women – then took Malcolm to lunch at the home of an African-American expatriate identified only as Mrs. Brown. In his diary, Malcolm writes only that "We went by Professor Hope's home and had 7 Up," and that "Azizah went out, while the rest of us talked," and then later says that he lunched with al-Hibri alone, after his lecture. Given these divergent accounts, the exact timing is hard to pin down. Whatever meal they were

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<sup>16</sup> Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Viking, 2011), 370.

eating and whoever their host was, Marable goes on to relate a story of one the white female students who formed the welcoming committee, Marian Faye Novak. Novak reconstructed their brief encounter, recollecting that “another white student, Sara, said, ‘I think you were absolutely right, Malcolm, . . . when you accused the white man of having the devil in him.’ Upset by the remark, Novak replied defensively, ‘I didn’t choose this skin but it’s the only one I have.’ Sara quickly apologized, Novak remembered, ‘not just for herself and her particular ancestors, but for me and mine, too, while Malcolm X nodded and smiled.’”<sup>17</sup> Marable argues that “Novak stereotyped Malcolm’s response even though he did not utter a word during the exchange.”<sup>18</sup> After this final visit and speaking appearance in Beirut, Malcolm flew out of Lebanon through Cairo and on to Khartoum, spending his last few moments in the airport with al-Hibri and briefly, Malik Badri.

### **B. The Autobiography, “as told to Alex Haley”**

The full title of the book is *The Autobiography of Malcolm X, as told to Alex Haley*. A joint project between Malcolm and journalist Alex Haley and published soon after Malcolm’s assassination, it has come under scrutiny by recent scholarship, particularly Manning Marable’s work, for having been excessively censored, influenced and mediated by Haley. Haley’s politics – he was a Republican, and integrationist, and an FBI collaborator – were certainly hostile to Malcolm’s own. It is nonetheless undeniable that this book had a profound impact on American society when it was published in 1965 and that this impact has, if anything, only increased in the intervening decades. James Baldwin

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<sup>17</sup> Marable, *Malcolm X*, 370

<sup>18</sup> Marable, *Malcolm X*, 370

was inspired to write a screenplay based on the *Autobiography*, which in turn became the inspiration for Spike Lee's award-winning film starring Denzel Washington, which inspired even further generations with Malcolm's words and example. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* has been on bestseller lists, on lists of essential American reading, on banned book lists, blacklists and watch lists. Its impact and its importance in defining Malcolm's legacy are frankly immeasurable.

Malcolm's ghostwriter, editor, and collaborator Alex Haley, can be seen as part of the long tradition of Black American writings being published through an amanuensis, typically a white amanuensis, who sometimes explicitly vouches for the validity of the author and their perspectives, thereby also arguably holding a place in a genealogy that starts with 19<sup>th</sup> century slave narratives.<sup>19</sup> From Phyllis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass up to the too-recent past, this publishing practice produces an intermediary who guarantees that what follows in the book is acceptable to a (white) audience. Haley both confounds and performs this function for Malcolm's *Autobiography*.

Malcolm X has joined the pantheon of African American cultural leaders, indeed of globally significant American figures. Alex Haley was during his life and is today the highest-selling author of Black nonfiction in U.S. history, best known for his iconic 1976 historical epic *Roots* and for his co-authorship of the *Autobiography*. Born in 1921 in New York state, Haley lived in Tennessee until entering the US Coast Guard just before the onset of World War II. Haley served in the Coast Guard for twenty, and throughout his

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<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey B. Leak, "Malcolm X and black masculinity in progress," in *The Cambridge Companion to Malcolm X*, ed. Robert Terrill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 53.

career he wrote and attempted to publish his work until finally he launched himself as a professional writer in 1959; the *Autobiography* was his first published book. Politically, Haley was both a Republican and a committed advocate of racial integration and was “not even mildly sympathetic with the [Nation of Islam] group’s aims and racial philosophy”<sup>20</sup> which, Marable argues, was to Haley “an object lesson in America’s failure to achieve interracial justice and fairness.” In 1963, he co-authored with white writer Alfred Balk a *Saturday Evening Post* article about the NOI entitled “Black Merchants of Hate.” This article was written with direct assistance from the FBI, which allowed Haley and Balk access to their files on the NOI in tacit exchange for an article that served FBI purposes.

There is also a curious document in the Malcolm X papers at the Schomburg Center: a letter from Alex Haley to “The Director” of the FBI, “concerning: Black Muslims.” In this letter, Haley writes that two pairs of men, one with FBI credentials, inquired at his former home whether “the Black Muslim spokesman, Malcolm X” had been there recently. Haley’s letter more than answers this question in the affirmative, going on to emphasize his close collaboration with Malcolm. “I will be glad to talk with any of your investigators,” he concludes, “if any information is desired of me.” Cc’d on the letter are the president of Doubleday & Co. publishing, who at the time had the contract for the *Autobiography*, Paul Reynolds his literary agent, and Malcolm X himself. So Haley freely volunteered to collaborate with FBI and to inform on Malcolm X to them, and Malcolm himself was aware of it. There is a short handwritten note from Haley scrawled at the bottom of the copy in the Schomburg, Malcolm’s copy. “This will come as no surprise to you,” it reads, “as it doesn’t, really, to me – but a copy for your info. All the best! Alex.”

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<sup>20</sup> Marable, “Rediscovering Malcolm’s Life,” 32.

Malcolm and Haley's collaborative writing process was an alchemical mix of interview, editing, performance and subtle manipulation. In the private papers of Alex Haley's official biographer, Anne Romaine, Manning Marable found many clues as to the actual mechanics of the collaboration between author and amanuensis. Malcolm X would apparently "speak to Haley in "free style"; it was left to Haley to take hundreds of sentences into paragraphs and then appropriate subject areas. Malcolm also had a habit of scribbling notes to himself as he spoke. Haley learned to pocket these sketchy notes and later reassemble them, integrating the conscious with subconscious reflections into a workable narrative."<sup>21</sup> Haley himself refers to this process in his Epilogue to the *Autobiography*, written after Malcolm's assassination. Haley and Malcolm had both signed a contract which declared on Malcolm's part that "Nothing can be in this book's manuscript that I didn't say, and nothing can be left out that I want in it,"<sup>22</sup> and they had also agreed that Haley "could write comments of [his] own about [Malcolm] which would not be subject to his review."<sup>23</sup> Suspicious of FBI bugging, insistent on the giving all credit to Elijah Muhammad, and suspicious of the Christian, Republican, ex-military author, Malcolm only opened up to Haley when he was pushed to discuss his childhood, specifically his mother. Haley discovered a workaround for reaching Malcolm's private thoughts; noticing that Malcolm would routinely scribble on napkins and scraps of paper while he talked, Haley took to serving him coffee with reams of napkins and collecting them all afterward to glean more information.

Although Malcolm X had final approval of their hybrid text, he was not aware of all

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<sup>21</sup> Marable, "Rediscovering Malcolm's Life," 32

<sup>22</sup> X and Haley, *Autobiography*, 239

<sup>23</sup> X and Haley, *Autobiography*, 239

the actual editorial processes on Haley's side, sometimes mundane changes and sometimes significant. As Marable notes, "considering that Malcolm's final "metamorphosis" took place in 1963–65, the exact timing of when individual chapters were produced takes on enormous importance."<sup>24</sup> More of Haley's letters found the Romaine collection reveal that Doubleday's attorneys were allowed to monitor and disapprove whole sections of the Autobiography, changing names and deleting large blocks of text, particularly where Haley and Doubleday wished to downplay Malcolm X's explicit anti-Semitism. Haley's authorial duplicity was intended to "get [these edited passages] past Malcolm X," without his co-author's knowledge or consent. Thus the censorship of Malcolm X had begun well *prior* to his assassination."<sup>25</sup>

The Autobiography, then, cannot be taken at anything close to face-value, which is not to diminish its significance or its impact in any way. If anything, the stories of the complex authorship of the Autobiography only enrich the history it aims to tell, if not to tell entirely accurately or even autobiographically.

### **C. Precedents and Appendices in Black "Holy Land" Travel Narratives**

Malcolm X and Alex Haley's collaboration was arguably not the first of its kind, but one in a line of black travel narratives, specifically narratives of travel to a putative "holy land." Such spiritual travel narratives often fall into the antique academic field of Orientalism, and almost always represent a transit of the author from West, whether America or Europe, to East, whether a Christian holy land or, in Malcolm's case, a Muslim

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<sup>24</sup> Marable, "Rediscovering Malcolm's Life," 32

<sup>25</sup> Marable, "Rediscovering Malcolm's Life," 33

one. As such, they are both subject to many of the negatives of that discipline, but as specifically black travel narratives, they often present in counterpoint narrative to those written by white travelers. By appending Malcolm's black American and Muslim "holy land" travel narrative to a literary lineage reaching back to the mid-nineteenth century, several possibilities are generated.

Here I will address two specific points raised by appending Malcolm's pilgrimage story to black American "holy land" travel narratives. The first is the importance of "Holy Land"-oriented geography of the Middle East by a black American Muslim; that is to say, particularly as a non-Christian, and thus in distinction to most of Malcolm's significant predecessors, among them, David Dorr, Adam Clayton Powell Sr., Edward Wilmot Blyden.<sup>26</sup> When Malcolm writes of the importance of the Holy Land, he is referring to the cities of Mecca and Medina, which were then and are still part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Malcolm does not visit Jerusalem, yet he is a crucial example of an American "Holy Land" pilgrim who encounters the geographies of the Middle East through a Western orientalist lens.

Second, I will explain how Malcolm X's narrative of "Holy Land" travel and in particular his writing about Beirut and Lebanese women, while differing in significant ways, benefits profoundly from analysis through Alex Lubin's argument that the Orientalist travel narrative was "a medium for African Americans to narrate as Western travelers and thereby gain subjectivity and recognition as Western subjects...[with the] Western

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<sup>26</sup> Lubin relies heavily on the vast archives of print media - journals, manifestos, and newspapers - produced by the radical groups and figures they foreground. Lubin emphasizes that many of his subjects are economically elite, literate males; an acknowledgement that is eloquent and appreciated. There are surely stories untold and dimensions unexplored to all the narratives - and of course, those experiences that were never narrated in print.

authority to gaze East.”<sup>27</sup> This Orientalist logic, carried over by Malcolm from the United States, takes visible form in his fixation on the appearance and attire of the young women of Lebanon.

In the first chapter of his book *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary*, Alex Lubin carefully delineates an understanding of American orientalism which contradicts Edward Said’s definition of it. Said argues in his ever-relevant *Orientalism* that because the academic discipline of Orientalism was crucially tied to the exercise of imperial power, American Orientalism has only developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lubin takes a more comprehensive view; his understanding of orientalism includes a whole range of transnational networks and not just those of imperial domination. Early American missionaries to the Mount Lebanon region, the 1862 founding of the Syrian Protestant College, the opening of American consulates across the Middle East, and the cultural phenomenon of “Holy Land Mania” and travel writing all come under Lubin’s scope as practices of American orientalism. By redirecting our focus to this lineage and away from the reductive idea that American interest in and identification with the Levant began after the second World War, Lubin opens the door to a crucial point of analysis: early black American travel writing about the Middle East.

In his first chapter, Lubin presents several travel narratives by African diaspora authors of their trips to the “Holy Land”, examining “how African American geographies of liberation engaged Palestine and the Middle East through the Western optics of

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<sup>27</sup> Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 27.



American orientalism and European Zionism.”<sup>28</sup>. David Dorr, an enslaved man who accompanied his master on travels to Europe and the Middle East from 1851 to 1854, is the first known narrator of such a trip and the first subject of Lubin’s chapter. Dorr’s book, *A Coloured Man Round the World*, is saturated with orientalist tropes of the Levantine areas he visits, characterizing the places and the people as backward, un-modern, heathen, and defined by laziness and trickery. Far from taking this rhetoric at face value, Lubin reveals the complicated dynamics at play in the orientalism of an African American writer. By participating in the Western practice of knowledge construction about the East, Dorr claimed for himself a position as a subject of the West, *through* rather than against the West, claiming authority to speak *to* other Americans *about* Orientals.

Yet he is not merely positioning himself as an American like any other, as Lubin astutely points out. Simultaneously, Dorr acknowledged his profound non-subjectivity as an enslaved African, with frequent allusions to Western slavery. *A Coloured Man Round the World* is dedicated to his “slave mother, wherever she may be,” a dedication that “disrupts the travel narrative’s occidental modernity by illuminating the practice of racial terror and backwardness within the West.”<sup>29</sup> (28) Dorr had claimed an authoritative Western subjectivity by orientalizing and denigrating the Levant, but having achieved that subjectivity, he was able to turn the perspicacity of his gaze onto the West itself. In *A Coloured Man Round the World*, Dorr “engaged the legacy of slavery in the context of an orientalist travel narrative,” at once acknowledging the orientalist presupposition of Western superiority to the East and at the same time reflecting the West’s own barbarism

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<sup>28</sup> Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation*, 47

<sup>29</sup> Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation*, 28

back to itself.<sup>30</sup>

Coming more than a century after Dorr's *A Coloured Man Round the World*, Malcolm X's autobiography presents a traveller with a very different method of claiming subjectivity. Dorr's book is a far cry from the Black and Muslim internationalism and solidarity of Malcolm X, and the later intercommunalism of the Black Panthers, both of which sought often to emphasize the similarities between global struggles and those of black Americans. Dorr, an enslaved man being taken to the Orient by a white slave owner, is wary of discovering or pronouncing any kinship with the Arab world, and seeks rather to distance himself from it; to stand apart from it and judge it through the optics of Western subjectivity. Powell and Blyden both see potential in the East for leveraging a critique of racism of the West, but certainly do not denounce the West or its colonial history and present.

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<sup>30</sup> From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century into the early 20<sup>th</sup>, there were many other travel narratives like Dorr's, written by black ministers, politicians, and professional writers. With the Zionist movement developing in Europe, many black American travellers found Zionism and the Jewish Question to be a useful comparison and counterpoint to their own engagement with the imaginaries and realities of Palestine, the Holy Land. Adam Clayton Powell Sr., the pastor of the Abyssinian Black Church of Harlem and a major public figure at the time, traveled to Palestine in 1930, writing about his experience in *Palestine and Saints in Caesar's Household*. For Powell, Lubin writes, the Orient's significance was both in the sacred place it occupied in Christian tradition – the site of exodus – and “as a counterexample to occidental modernity.”<sup>30</sup> Zionism seemed to Powell to be a useful intervention into the Western conceptions of progress and modernity which obscured the brutality of Western imperialism, and therefore Zionism, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, could be seen as an anti-colonial discourse.

Powell was not alone in this theory; his travelling predecessor, Edward Wilmot Blyden, also held out such hopes for Zionism – and pan-Islamism – as countermodern examples, but not as decolonial ones. The “complex alchemy of orientalism, Zionism, and pan-Africanism within which he encountered the Levant”<sup>30</sup> led Blyden to typical orientalist critiques of Arabs as irrational and unmodern, and Ottoman rule as incapable of managing them. He believed that Western imperialism and colonialism would be highly beneficial to the region, and argument which he then brought to bear on the idea of African American colonization of Liberia. Blyden, in a stance that would faintly echoed by Malcolm almost a century later, believed that Islam would provide a better ideology for unifying Africans and African Americans in this project of benevolent colonization; he argued that Islam had historically been less violent than Christianity in its colonial projects. Like Dorr, Blyden's travel brought him both the physical and ideological proximity to the East that allowed him to challenge Western racism and colonialism while still advocating for Western supremacy over the Orient.

What then, might be the effects of adding Malcolm X's writing about his travels in the Middle East, to this genealogy? Striking similarities and provocative differences from the tradition of African American male travel writing about the Middle East present themselves immediately. More than a century after David Dorr published "A Coloured Man Round the World", Alex Haley oversaw the final editing and publication of Malcolm X's autobiography, with its vital final chapters telling the story of an African American man encountering his "Oriental" holy land for the first time.

The Holy Land, of course, refers to a different place for Malcolm than it did for his predecessors: Saudi Arabia, and the cities of Mecca and Medina. Malcolm's identity as a Muslim is one of the most salient differences between his work and that of Dorr, Powell, and Blyden. He eschews the religious differentiation from the "Orientals" practiced by those Christian writers and instead immediately foregrounds a profound identification and association with many of the people he meets. In his diaries, he repeatedly records that he met with suspicion from many Arabs until he convinced them that he was a Muslim, at which point he was warmly welcomed and even marveled at. This move on Malcolm's part for identification and inclusion in the East marks a profound difference from his travel-writing predecessors. He does occasionally express awkwardness at this offered inclusion, as in his awkwardness at praying in the home of Ibrahim Shiab in Beirut. Malcolm also struggles with his reconciling his undeniably Western expectations of modernity – in everything from roads and cars to culture and religion – with his desire to find kinship in the Levant and Saudi Arabia. His predecessors evaded such a struggle in most cases by pronouncing Western superiority, with Blyden even going so far as to advocate for benevolent colonialism.

Malcolm, deeply anti-imperial and anti-colonialist, cannot make this discursive move, but his own orientalism still manages to manifest itself in his consideration of the women he encounters and observes in Lebanon. His connection of their appearance and behavior to the “moral health” of their countries is a stark example of one of the most classic Orientalist tropes practiced by everyone from Gustave Flaubert to W.E.B. DuBois, and many others of the gendered and masculinist readings of the Levant recorded by his predecessors.

## CHAPTER III

### INTRICATE FEMINISMS OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

It is possible to chart two major preoccupations for feminist scholarship about Malcolm X; what role black women played in his intellectual and political growth while he was alive, and then what effect he had, in turn, on black feminism after his death. Luminaries no less than Angela Davis, Maya Angelou, and bell hooks have tackled both of these considerations, though none specifically addresses his writing about his visit to Lebanon. Manning Marable's recent and revolutionary book *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* did much to restore the record of the important roles played by women from his own family and his contemporary activists and thinkers. The task of both those concerned mostly with development of Malcolm's praxis and writing and those concerned with his legacy remains vital. One of the driving purposes of this paper is the respond to Sheila Radford Hill's call to "explore the contradiction between Malcolm X's misogynist statements *about women* and his actual relationships *with black women*, most of whom were thoughtful, politically astute, educated, and as resourceful and committed as he was to the liberation of black people."<sup>31</sup>

#### **A. Malcolm X and Black Feminisms**

Surely the very first woman to influence Malcolm and to affect his understanding of gender was his mother, Louise Little. Both Louise and her husband Earl were dedicated

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<sup>31</sup> Sheila Radford-Hill, "Womanizing Malcolm X," in *The Cambridge Companion to Malcolm X*, ed. Robert Terrill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 64

followers of Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association. According to the memories Malcolm's siblings who survived him and even his own daughter's testimony, Louise Little provided spiritual education and a political racial consciousness to her children.<sup>32</sup> After the murder of her husband the Ku Klux Klan, Louise's mental health declined precipitously and she was committed to a mental institution for the next 25 years, released by the efforts of Malcolm and several of his siblings in 1963. She would go on to outlive Malcolm himself by 26 years. Malcolm had a complicated relationship with his mother; a complexity which is evidenced in the Autobiography. Haley's epilogue records that getting Malcolm to talk about his mother was the key to unleashing all of his personal memories and opinions rather than the dogma of the Nation of Islam, but the same epilogue records Malcolm's sometimes vitriolic rants about the weakness and immorality of women. Towards his father, Patricia Hill Collins argues, Malcolm was far more laudatory, and Collins suggests this divergence was influenced by Malcolm's own politics of colorism. "Where his father was strong, dark-skinned, manly, and nationalist, his mother was weak, light-skinned, feminine and 'mixed-up.' He should be admired, she should be pitied. Where [Earl Little] was racially pure, [Louise] was racially mixed and integrated."<sup>33</sup> Already, long before the Nation of Islam came into his life, Malcolm had internalized a sense of gendered expectations, and of severe consequences for deviating from those gender roles.

After his mother's institutionalization, it was Malcolm's half-sister Ella Collins who

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<sup>32</sup> Ilyasah Shabazz with Kim McLarin, *Growing up X: A Memoir by the Daughter of Malcolm X*, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2002), 53.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning to Think for Ourselves: Malcolm X's Black Nationalism Reconsidered," in *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*, ed. Joe Wood (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 190.

took the responsibility of raising him. Ella was a force in her own right and certainly not someone who performed to the feminine gender role of her time. In the *Autobiography*, Malcolm says that the major impact of Ella's arrival, at least upon me, was that she was the first really proud black woman I had ever seen in my life.”<sup>34</sup> Ella was a “commanding woman...not just black but, like [their] father jet black...” who seemed to Malcolm to be someone who “sat, moved, talked, did everything [in a way] that bespoke somebody who did and got exactly what she wanted.”<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey B. Leak argues that Malcolm’s intimidation by and resentment of Ella, coupled with his gratitude and demonstrates a “level of revelation - conscious or not - regarding his views about and relationships with women [that] is refreshing in its honesty, if not its accuracy. Regarding Ella, she undoubtedly was one of the pillars in his life, but in her strength, he saw emasculation.”<sup>36</sup> (58) Though the last in the Little family to join the Nation of Islam, Ella adopted its strictures with zeal and the commitment she had demonstrated all her life in local community organizing. It was later Ella who financed Malcolm’s hajj and travels to Lebanon, Egypt, and West Africa, and Ella who took over the leadership of Malcolm’s short-lived Organization for Afro-American unity after Malcolm’s assassination. <sup>37</sup>

It is notable that it was Ella Collins who took over that position and not Dr. Betty Shabazz, Malcolm’s wife. In bell hooks essay “Malcolm X: The Longed-For Feminist Manhood,” hooks both expresses sympathy with Shabazz’s role as Malcolm’s widow – “just the fact of having been Malcolm’s wife makes her an icon in the eyes of many folks

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<sup>34</sup> X and Haley, *Autobiography*, 32

<sup>35</sup> X and Haley, *Autobiography*, 32

<sup>36</sup> Leak, “Malcolm X and black masculinity in progress,” 58

<sup>37</sup> Radford-Hill, “Womanizing Malcolm X,” 66

who are seeking to learn from Malcolm’s life and works”<sup>38</sup> – but also vents some frustration with Shabazz’s rejection of that role. After several interviews, hooks explains that “she [Shabazz] does not fully interrogate the question of gender from a nonsexist perspective”<sup>39</sup> and rejects any characterization of her husband as having been misogynist. hooks dramatically declares Shabazz to be complicit in patriarchy if she denies the progressive changes in Malcolm’s ideology that so many black feminist scholars have charted in his political development. For hooks, and other black feminist scholars who have been frustrated with Dr. Shabazz’s positions, it is of the utmost importance to “link Malcolm’s break with the patriarchal, hierarchical structure of Islam with a critical rethinking of the place of hierarchy in any social and political organization”<sup>40</sup>; in this, hooks at least finds Shabazz woefully short.

Erik S. McDuffie and Komozi Woodard’s essay “‘If you’re in a country that’s progressive, the woman is progressive’: Black Women Radicals and the Making of the Politics and Legacy of Malcolm X” gives Betty Shabazz another critical look. Komozi and Woodard analyze interviews with major Black American radical women – Vicki Garvin, Louise Little and Betty Shabazz, Queen Mother Audley Moore, and more – and argue that these women were crucial to Malcolm’s development of his theories of black self-determination, Pan-Africanism, and internationalism; they were his teachers and his mentors. The authors argue that the impact of these women on his life constitutes one of the most significant gaps in the scholarly engagement with Malcolm X. Woodard and

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<sup>38</sup> bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 190.

<sup>39</sup> hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, 191.

<sup>40</sup> hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, 193.



McDuffie assert that these relationships bore direct fruit in Malcolm's thought and writing, tracing the roots of his "ballot or bullet" framework to conversations with Vicki Garvin and Audley Moore. These conversations, they argue, only began to really bear fruit towards the end of his life, after his hajj.

On December 27, 1964, eight months after the completion of that hajj, and only two months after Malcolm's second visit to Beirut and the Middle East, Malcolm appeared on a Christian radio program called "Community Corner," hosted by Bernice Bass. This charming and fascinating interview caught Malcolm at a time in his life and thought when he was in the process of tremendous change, seeking to establish a new identity and a new politics for himself that nonetheless maintained some continuity with his recent past in the NOI. After introducing him as "the son of a Baptist minister,"<sup>41</sup> Bass immediately launched into questioning about his recent travels, and whether they had effected his viewpoint on "the Afro-American questions."<sup>42</sup> When asked specifically about African and Arab nations that he would characterize as developing quickly, politically, he devotes the length of his answer to Ghana, mentioning specifically the achievements of Shirley Graham DuBois, W.E.B. DuBois' widow and a powerhouse activist and author. Graham DuBois, he says, is "to [his] knowledge, the only Black director of television in Africa...and she's a woman, and she's an Afro-American, and I think that should make Afro-American women mighty proud," as well as being "one of the most intelligent women [he had] ever met."<sup>43</sup> Bass urges him to expand on the role of women in the emerging

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<sup>41</sup> Sandeep Atwal, *Malcolm X: Collected Speeches, Debates and Interviews (1960-1965)* (Seattle: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 556.

<sup>42</sup> Atwal, *Malcolm X: Collected Speeches*, 556

<sup>43</sup> Atwal, *Malcolm X: Collected Speeches*, 560

Ghanaian political scene:

“Bass: May I ask you—one of the points that you have not yet made in regard to that problem is the fact that the Ghanaian women there seem to be emerging on the scene at all levels.

Malcolm X: One thing I noticed in both the Middle East and Africa, in every country that was progressive, the women were progressive. In every country that was underdeveloped and backward, it was to the same degree that the women were undeveloped, or underdeveloped, and backward.

Bass: What you’re saying is the women are actually playing a part there, in Africa?

Malcolm X: Well, no, I’m saying this: that it’s noticeable that in these type of societies where they put the woman in a closet and discourage her from getting a sufficient education and don’t give her the incentive by allowing her maximum participation in whatever area of the society where she’s qualified, they kill her incentive. And killing her incentive, she kills the incentive in her children. And the man himself has no competition so he doesn’t develop to his fullest potential. So in the African countries where they opt for mass education, whether it be female or male, you and that they have a more valid society, a more progressive society. And Ghana is one of the best examples of this. Egypt was also another example of this.”<sup>44</sup>

The statements on women— if not precisely on gender as such — made in this interview would seem to represent an almost diametrically opposed view to Malcolm’s analysis of Lebanese women and their failure to represent or embody the best aspirations of their nation-state.

In this same December 1964 interview, Bass calls out for his current contradiction of some of his earlier statements and ideological positions. Malcolm is quick to remind her that “they weren’t [his] statements, they were [Elijah Muhammad]’s statements, and I was repeating them.”<sup>45</sup> She uses the verb “parroting” to press him a bit further, and he replies coolly that “now the parrot has jumped out of the cage.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Atwal, *Malcolm X: Collected Speeches*, 562

<sup>45</sup> Atwal, *Malcolm X: Collected Speeches*, 562

<sup>46</sup> Atwal, *Malcolm X: Collected Speeches*, 563

## B. Black Feminism and Malcolm X

bell hooks wrote in her 1994 book *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* that “critical scholarship on Malcolm X contains no *substantial* work from a feminist standpoint”<sup>47</sup> [emphasis original]. Erik McDuffie and Komozi Woodard have asserted that “the impact of black women radicals in shaping the life and legacy of Malcolm X constitutes one of the most significant gaps in the study of this key figure.”<sup>48</sup> Two years before hooks published *Outlaw Culture*, Patricia Hill Collins had addressed the impact of Malcolm’s black nationalist philosophy on black feminism and suggested that much of his troubled legacy for feminists had its origins in the fact of his assassination before the full articulation of black feminist thought in the 1970s and 80s. In the intervening two decades since these important works, feminist scholarship on Malcolm X has increased both in production and in importance, though significant lacunae remain. hooks and Collins remain two of the major theorists to have dealt with Malcolm X’s importance from a specifically feminist and black feminist position. Despite such powerful and essential work as theirs and the subsequent work of many other scholars, Malcolm X’s legacy remains dominated by a masculinist narrative that obscures the more complicated truths of gender in his life. to feminist activism and scholarship

In 1992, Spike Lee’s film “Malcolm X” came out to massive commercial and critical success. An all-star cast, big production budget, and global merchandizing campaigns turned the film into a cultural phenomenon, and produced perhaps the most

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<sup>47</sup> hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, 214

<sup>48</sup> McDuffie and Woodard, “If you’re in a country that’s progressive,” 508

widely known and recognized version of Malcolm X's life. Lee's film was the culmination of decades of alternating work and neglect on a project to bring Malcolm's life to the screen, beginning only a few years after his death with James Baldwin's initial effort at a screenplay. Brian Norman's analysis of Baldwin's screenplay, which he later turned into a stage scenario, argues that Baldwin's vision "positions Malcolm's story not as a autobiographical analog to discrete eras of black history but as an unfinished project which accrues new meanings and possibilities when its familiar parts enter new territories, identities, and ideologies."<sup>49</sup> Baldwin took the Haley-edited Autobiography as one of his source materials, but he rearranged chronologies and identities in a way that echoed Malcolm's own constant self-reinvention and reference, as well as the flux of black politics at the time. Columbia studios rejected Baldwin's screenplay even after a co-writer was brought in for drastic rewriters, and Baldwin hastily removed himself from a film project that he deemed would be "a second assassination."<sup>50</sup> When Baldwin left the project, all of the proto-feminist characterizations and narratives that he had developed in the screenplay were abandoned, as well as his broader analysis of gender and sexuality in the masculinist narrative of Malcolm's life.

Spike Lee, who acknowledged the passing influence of Baldwin on the script, produced a film as different from Baldwin's idea as could be imagined, and was criticized for it by no less luminaries than bell hooks, Stokely Carmichael, and Amiri Baraka, the

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<sup>49</sup> Bruce Norman, "Bringing Malcolm X to Hollywood," in *The Cambridge Companion to Malcolm X*, ed. Robert Terrill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 44.

<sup>50</sup> Norman, "Bringing Malcolm X to Hollywood,"<sup>43</sup>

latter of whom protested the film before it was even released.<sup>51</sup> Both of Malcolm's major popular biographers – Alex Haley and Lee – go to great lengths to represent Malcolm's political development and religious experiences as separate from all the female influences in his life, and his eventual "turn" to orthodox Islam as only tangentially related to gender, if at all. Lee's masculinist version of Malcolm's history, with Haley's *Autobiography* as the primary source and narrative framework, excises nearly all the women who influenced Malcolm's life, seeing fit only to include his wife, Dr. Betty Shabazz, and his infant daughters. This removal of all of Malcolm's significant, non-sexual female relationships revises the truer history in favor of a more Hollywood narrative of a lone hero, driven and supported only by his own internal fire. Yet Lee, along with *Malcolm X*'s white producer Marvin Worth, that "there is no revisionism in this film, that as Worth puts it, 'We're not playing games with making up our opinion of the truth. We're doing *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.'" hooks argues that in fact "the absence of any portrayal of significant family members, particularly women...does indeed revise and distort."<sup>52</sup>

By now it goes almost without saying that Worth's attribution of objective truth the *Autobiography* is practically farcical. In Nell Irvin Painter's review the film, she says that both the film and the *Autobiography* "simulate history by [presuming] to purvey autobiographical rather than biographical truths," sarcastically saying that as a metonymic stylization, "if Malcolm X is to work as a racial symbol, it is best not to look at him too

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<sup>51</sup> Norman, "Bringing Malcolm X to Hollywood," 46

<sup>52</sup> hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, 160

closely.”<sup>53</sup> Lee’s film “as sentimental, romanticized drama...seduces us by encouraging us to forget the brutal reality that created black rage and militancy.”<sup>54</sup> By not only forgetting, but actively denying that history, hooks worries that Bayard Rustin’s dire prediction that “White America, not the Negro people, will determine Malcolm X’s role in history.”<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere, hooks writes that “Lee’s investment in patriarchal film practices that mirror dominant patterns makes him the perfect black candidate for entrance to the Hollywood canon,”<sup>56</sup> thereby making Lee complicit in the diminution of Malcolm’s legacy, at the expense of both the women who knew and influenced him deeply in his lifetime and the feminists who came after Malcolm and drew inspiration from his work.

Narrators of his life from Alex Haley to Spike Lee to Malcolm X himself have obscured the important contributions of female activists, writers, and thinkers to Malcolm’s revolutionary political and intellectual trajectory. Much of the work of hooks and others has involved a kind of archaeology, seeking out Malcolm’s encounters with and education by black women in almost every period of his life. In Beirut particularly, his meeting and later correspondence with Azizah al-Hibri clearly had an impact on both of them, which makes al-Hibri’s exclusion from the *Autobiography* all the more puzzling and profound.

In a lecture given at Harvard in 1982, Audre Lorde said that “in the last year of his life, Malcolm X added a breadth to his essential vision...Before he was killed, Malcolm had altered and broadened his opinions concerning the role of women in society and the

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<sup>53</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, “Malcolm X across the Genres,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 98, no. 2, (April 1993): 433, accessed April 2, 2016. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2166842>.

<sup>54</sup> hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, 164

<sup>55</sup> hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, 155

<sup>56</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 126

revolution.”<sup>57</sup> She connected this changing attitude towards female and feminist contributions to the liberation struggle with a general change in Malcolm’s political vision, and she specifically suggesting that he came to associate himself more with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s policies of nonviolence.

Lorde is hardly the only one to draw this conclusion. In so many histories of Malcolm’s life and thought, historians argue that after his break with the Nation of Islam, his hajj, and his time in the Middle East and West Africa, his political outlook and agenda underwent a radical change towards a more peaceful, internationalist, even integrationist stance. The responsibility for much of this sentimental version can be laid at the feet of Alex Haley’s editing of the *Autobiography*. What is made plainly and vexingly visible by the Beirut moment as it is narrated in the *Autobiography* is that this facile understanding of Malcolm’s thought in the last year of his life is woefully oversimplified. Malcolm’s thoughts on women and gender in Lebanon in 1964 and the way he wrote about them or didn’t write about them afterwards reveals a greater complexity of thought than a simple and total renunciation of any of his previous ideologies.

Much of the work of black feminists is concerned with dismantling toxic constructions of black masculinity. Embodying at nearly every moment what scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw first termed intersectionality, the struggle for black women’s liberation also requires the liberation of both black men and women from race and racist constructions of gender. In the 1980s and 1990s, black feminist scholarship on Malcolm X thrived and grappled with his legacy, alternately praising his political insight and attacking

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<sup>57</sup> Audre Lorde, “Learning From the 60’s,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 85.

his misogyny. Black feminist scholars and artists have understood as a hero, as a challenge, as a precursor to the misogyny of the Black Power movement, and as a leader in the struggle for civil and human rights. And yet, as Sheila Radford-Hill argues, “men have largely shaped his public legacy” through books, films, music and research. Radford-Hill urges black women in particular to “explore the contradiction between Malcolm X’s misogynist statements *about women* and his actual relationships *with black women*, most of whom were thoughtful, politically astute, educated, and as resourceful and committed as he was to the liberation of black people” (emphasis original).<sup>58</sup>

From his earliest childhood, after the Klan-enacted murder of his father, Malcolm was raised and influenced by the women in his life, beginning with his mother, Louise Little, his sister and half-sister Hilda Little and Ella Collins. Later in life and during his travels in West Africa, he would meet and talk with Maya Angelou, Shirley Graham DuBois, Vicki Garvin, Queen Audley Moore, and Fannie Lou Hamer. After his death, several women including Ruby Dee, Abbey Lincoln, and Florynce Kennedy gave important support to Betty Shabazz and her daughters. “In contrast to the patriarchal rhetoric of the NOI,” Radford-Hill argues, “Malcolm’s life reveals his willingness to relate to and rely on self-determined black women.”<sup>59</sup>

Given all of these dynamic female influences in Malcolm’s life, their total absence or at best marginality in the *Autobiography* becomes entirely suspicious. Komozi Woodard and Eric McDuffie argue that this erasure “can be explained in part by the patriarchal gender politics embraced by Malcolm X and Alex Haley...at the time they conducted the

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<sup>58</sup> Radford-Hill, “Womanizing Malcolm X,” 64

<sup>59</sup> Radford-Hill, “Womanizing Malcolm X,” 67



interviews that served as the basis for the text, when Malcolm was still in the staunchly patriarchal Nation of Islam.”<sup>60</sup> For McDuffie and Woodard, Malcolm would begin to “forge a more progressive position on gender...after his break from the NOI”<sup>61</sup> and its rigid identification of distinct male and female gender roles, Gods and Earths respectively. Radford-Hill puts argues for the same understanding of Malcolm’s transformation in a less directly chronological way when she says that “that as [Malcolm] developed politically, he remade his masculine subjectivity in ways that allowed him to see women as agents of social change.”<sup>62</sup>

Patricia Hill Collins wrote an essay for Joe Wood’s 1993 book *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*, which was published in 1992 as a caution against the “Malcolmania” induced by Spike Lee’s film and the potential negative effects of mainstream popularity on his legacy, the very same simplifying and whitening of his history that Rustin and hooks worried about. In her analysis of Malcolm’s broad gender politics, Collins concludes that just before his death, less than a year after his hajj travels, Malcolm was moving towards a more holistic, less misogynistic, perspective on men and women and on gender. His embrace of orthodox Sunni Islam, his break with the misogynistic Nation of Islam, and his more “moderate” stances on race and gender coalition building all help Collins illustrate her point.

Collins, in this one way echoing Haley and Lee, divides Malcolm’s life into three distinct periods of very different length. The first she counts as stretching from his birth to his prison conversion to the Nation of Islam, from 1925 to the 1940s; his periods as

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<sup>60</sup> McDuffie and Woodard, “If you’re in a country that’s progressive,” 509

<sup>61</sup> McDuffie and Woodard, “If you’re in a country that’s progressive,” 509

<sup>62</sup> Radford-Hill, “Womanizing Malcolm X,” 68

Malcolm Little, Detroit Red, and the early days of Malcolm X all fit in here. The second major period in his life runs until 1964, when he broke with the NOI and travelled, developing his definition of race and his perceptions of the connections among race, color, and political consciousness changed, rejecting the biological essentialism of the NOI. She also argues that in this period, “Malcolm’s emerging social-class analysis also led to changes in his Black Nationalist philosophy. Malcolm’s increasing attention to global structures of colonialism and imperialism led him to begin to consider the influence of global capitalism.”<sup>63</sup> The last and shortest period of Collins’ triptych ends with his death in 1965, after which she mourns that “because Malcolm was assassinated before Black feminist politics were articulated in the 1970s and 1980s, his Black nationalism projects an implicit and highly problematic gender analysis.”<sup>64</sup> This explanation echoes Radford-Hill and McDuffie and Woodard in suggesting that Malcolm’s politics of gender had taken a drastic progressive turn in the last year of his life, but ultimately fell short and remained trapped in masculinist and misogynist frameworks, perhaps because he was a product of his time and perhaps because he simply did not have enough time.

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<sup>63</sup> Collins, “Learning to Think for Ourselves,” 189

<sup>64</sup> Collins, “Learning to Think for Ourselves,” 189

## CHAPTER IV

### MALCOLM X SEEING LEBANESE WOMEN

Collins, hooks, and most other black feminists have argued that Malcolm X's premature death cut short the development of his thoughts on women's place in the movement, and their human rights globally. His hajj itself and his post-hajj travels are usually given as the watershed moment in his ideological transformation. After breaking with the Nation of Islam, he left the United States as well, and came back a changed man, both in his own words and in the understandings of most of his interpreters. He went first to Egypt and then on hajj to Mecca, where he encountered Nasser's United Arab Republic as a model for political modernity, and then Mecca, where he experienced a spiritual brotherhood which also stood as an almost ideal model for him. He stopped in Beirut, and then proceeded to West Africa, where he spent much of his time with David and Shirley Graham DuBois and met Maya Angelou, and began to shift his politics of race and gender. Beirut then is the liminal threshold, the hairpin turn between these two major sites of Malcolm's person and politics, which makes Lebanon's capital city a crucial site to see his opinion of women and his gender politics more broadly. Given the discrepancies between his own lived experiences recorded in his diary and in others' memories, and the description of Lebanese women in the Autobiography, we find a chance to interrogate this critical moment in Malcolm X's engagement with gender.

One of the prevailing arguments in black feminist scholarship is that Malcolm's early death cut short his chance – the very likely chance – of developing a more sophisticated, humane, and feminist viewpoint. In this understanding, his hajj marked a

turning point, with Beirut and his writing about it being a last gasp of the old misogyny. But if we look at how he wrote about his experience in Beirut, we can see that this is not necessarily the case. After all of these amazing experiences in Beirut, he came back to United States and, in his collaboration with Haley, made the choice castigate Lebanese women in writing for their liberty and boldness. In his writing, and Haley's editing, on this particular page of the Autobiography we find a counterargument to this prevailing belief about Malcolm's legacy to black feminism.

Malcolm left Beirut on May 1<sup>st</sup>, recording his easy trip to Nigeria after a connection in Cairo. Ten journal pages and four days later, he writes what presumably was the germ of his attention to Lebanon in Chapter 17 of the Autobiography. "The Arab World," he wrote, "is trying to awaken and modernize itself. There are many religious, political, economic, and psychological obstacles that must be overcome. The most intense self-pride (nationalism) is seen in UAR. No Egyptian reflects any inferiority complex, and most of them are alert to protect and project a positive image." Skipping lines, he goes on: "The moral strength or weakness of any country is quickly measured by the attire and attitudes of its women, especially the young. Lebanon is a good example, and so is UAR (compared to Arabia). Material progress seems to destroy spiritual values. If these two (material and spiritual) could be properly balanced, paradise would then exist."

There is evidently much to unpack here, especially when this journal entry is read side by side with the Beirut page of the Autobiography. Most crucially, the importance of Lebanon and the importance of gender are downplayed in the journal and perhaps overemphasized in the Autobiography. The argument Malcolm makes in this journal entry is one about balancing spiritual and material values in pursuit of Arab political and

economic development; it is not by any stretch a misogynist attack on the liberty and affected dress of Lebanese women. Lebanon indeed is no more than an example, mentioned not necessarily as the direct inspiration for this insight, but as one instance of its general truth, according to Malcolm. The United Arab Republic serves just as well to make the same point. Saudi Arabia, almost always referred to by Malcolm as simply Arabia, is help up in both the journal and Autobiography as a place where women conform to Malcolm's ideal of feminine social performance. The UAR and Lebanon are cited as contrasting examples to emphasize the superior spiritual and material success attained by Saudi Arabia.

But only a few days earlier, in a journal entry dated April 24, Malcolm grappled with what he perceived as Saudi Arabia's important failures in search of such a paradisiacal balance between modernization and spirituality. Having just completed on that day, he writes in his journal, "The Arabs are poor at public relations. They say insha Allah and then wait, and while they are waiting the world passes them by. [...] Just as the Muslims here now see the necessity of modern roads, buildings, schools, even modernizing the Great Mosque itself, I pray they will also see the necessity of modernizing the methods to propagate Islam and project an image the mind of the modern world can respect."

Juxtaposing these passages, and their later development in the Autobiography, reveals to us a more complicated picture than the Autobiography's account alone would suggest. The passage written on April 24<sup>th</sup> suggests that Malcolm was also concerned with perception; with how he himself was perceived, how Islam was perceived by "the West" and specifically by Americans who might be brought to convert, which can all be related to this anxiety about Arab public relations. This logic is his own particular form of

Orientalism, with the usual gendered optics playing a crucial role. Malcolm fixates on the “attire and attitudes” of young women as that facet of a culture which would represent it to the world and must therefore demonstrate a harmonious balance between spiritual values and modern economic and political virtues. This is a heavy task for any outfit, whether blue jeans or hijab.

In the last interview Malcolm X ever gave, completed the day before his assassination, he responded to questions from the *Al-Muslimoon Magazine* published by the Islamic Center in Geneva, Switzerland. When asked about the current state of Islam, and how Islam might face the “malicious, resourceful alliance of Zionism, atheism, and religious fanaticism,” Malcolm returned to this theme of public relations, and of forming a global solidarity. “Since the Arab image is almost inseparable from the image of Islam,” he said, “the Arab world has a multiple responsibility that it must live up to. Since Islam is a religion of brotherhood and unity those who take the lead in expounding this religion are duty-bound to set the highest example of brotherhood and unity.” He pronounced a need for “Cairo and Mecca” to join together to face the challenges Islam faced, or “other forces will rise up in this present generation of young, forward-thinking Muslims and the ‘power centers’ will be taken from the hands of those that they are now in and placed elsewhere.” Placing his faith in Nasser’s Egypt and the religious guidance of al-Azhar mosque, and in Saudi Arabia, Malcolm demonstrated to the last his belief that a pan-Islamic alliance would be vital for the international brotherhood he had hoped to build.<sup>65</sup>

Yet for all his faith, he remained trapped in the optics and expectations of American orientalism through which several of his travel-writing predecessors had also viewed the

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Middle East. Malcolm's orientalist views on gender hampered his efforts at transnational solidarity. In the Autobiography, even for that briefest of flashes in his diary, he is still ventriloquizing a resonant discourse of orientalism and misogyny. That act of ventriloquism obfuscates his much more interesting history with women from his earliest childhood to his visits to Beirut and beyond, and also shows that he is still participating in Western oppressive logics even after his hajj, which much of black feminist scholarship has argued represented a turning point towards progressivism in gender and race.

The Autobiography, as has been well-established, was a complex collaborative text that was "doubly reconstructed, with Malcolm's recollections then framed by Haley's interpretive decisions."<sup>66</sup> Nothing written in it may be taken entirely at face value, and certainly not as objective fact. Here, perhaps, is the tragic abbreviation that hooks and Collins mourn – Malcolm was robbed of the opportunity to edit and revise any statements he shared with Haley. Patricia Hill Collins has argued that Malcolm X must not be either romanticized or demonized for "taking his cues from the dominant gender ideology of his times, Malcolm X's view of women reflected dominant view of white manhood and womanhood applied uncritically to the situation of African Americans."<sup>67</sup> Given the suspect origin of much of the Autobiography, and given also the evidences of the notes in Malcolm's diary, Collins' warning seems particularly apt. And as both Marable and Painter noted, the important thing is to look closely and deeply and to live with the complexity of Malcolm's words.

In the same last interview given to *Al-Muslimoon*, Malcolm repeats and rephrases

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<sup>66</sup> Leak, "Malcolm X and black masculinity in progress," 53

<sup>67</sup> Leak, "Malcolm X and black masculinity in progress," 61

his earlier iterations of his post-hajj thinking on women and gender roles. Asked about his informed impressions of the Muslim world and its future, Malcolm responded with a fascinating inversion of his Autobiographical opinion about the role of women in representing their nation, their religion, and their race. He wrote:

“In every Middle East or African country I have visited, I noticed the country is as ‘advanced’ as its women are, or as backward as its women. By this I mean, in areas where the women have been pushed into the background and kept without education, the whole area or country is just as backward, uneducated, and ‘underdeveloped.’ Where the women are encouraged to get education and play a more active role in the all-around affairs of the community and the country, the entire people are more active, more enlightened, and more progressive. Thus, in my opinion, the Muslim religious leaders of today must re-evaluate and spell out with clarity the Muslim position on education in general and education for women in particular. And then a vast program must be launched to elevate the standard of education in the Muslim world. An old African proverb states: "Educate a man and you educate an individual; educate a woman and you educate an entire family."

This is indeed a far cry from the limited power he attributed to Arab women in the Autobiography – the power only to “reflect” their society, not to shape and influence it – and also very different from the expansive criticism leveled at the same women. If, as Patricia Hill Collins has argued, Malcolm often preached a version of male supremacy, at least “he experienced his maleness in ways that allowed him to maintain relationships with women as confidantes and collaborators.”<sup>68</sup>

Lebanese and Saudi Arabian and Egyptian women, and Muslim women broadly, are not really being talked about here; not *as they* are nor as they might see themselves, but instead as *what they represent* to Malcolm. They are superficial images, perceptions, projections, figures in his world of political and spiritual imaginaries. Thus it stands to reason that Saudi women are praised as modest and feminine, because Saudi Arabia is the

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<sup>68</sup> Collins, “Learning to Think for Ourselves,” 69



peak of spiritual development and therefore of social good. Likewise, Lebanese women are too liberal, too bold, too European, because Lebanon occupies and *was* the liminal space – neither sufficiently spiritual nor successfully modern – that Malcolm passes through to conclude his hajj. The oversimplified and symbolic depiction of Lebanese, and Saudi, women in the *Autobiography* performs the ventriloquism of Western gender roles and orientalism which remained a part of Malcolm’s ideology after his hajj, and perhaps even up to his death. There is no objective reality which with to contrast, but through reading Malcolm’s diaries from Beirut and the rest of his travels, we get a glimpse of the complexity of his efforts to both understand the world through these orientalist, sexist optics and to slough them off or transform them into something closer to his later radical, worldly progressivism.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

On February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1965, Ossie Davis, actor and civil rights activist and a personal friend of Malcolm’s, eulogized Malcolm at his funeral in Harlem in language that, while moving and beautiful, was decidedly masculinist. “Malcolm was our manhood, our living, black manhood! This was his meaning to his people. And, in honoring him, we honor the

best in ourselves,”<sup>69</sup> he said. He concluded by giving Malcolm one of his most well-known epithets, anointing him in quasi-Messianic language “a Prince – our own black shining Prince! – who didn’t hesitate to die, because he loved us so.”<sup>70</sup> As Eboni Marshall Turman has argued, Davis’ use of Malcolm’s life and death to assert and define black manhood resolutely too easily produces an “insistence on Black manhood [that] has too often been dependent on the dehumanization and demoralization of Black women.”<sup>71</sup>

Black feminists, artists, activists and scholars have worked for decades to countermand this insistence, to instead “insist that this manhood in its finest form develops, not at the social expense of black women, but in concert with them,”<sup>72</sup> in Jeffrey Leak’s words. Malcolm’s own chimerical mind and work has both aided and hindered their work. Even while he was still the most celebrated preacher of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm’s sermons would “simultaneously and paradoxically cast Black women as lying “tools of the devil” and as “beautiful black . . . sisters,” worthy of respect, love, admiration, and protection.”<sup>73</sup>

Malcolm X’s life defies the simple classifications and streamlinings it has been given in popular culture, and even occasionally in scholarship. He has been transmuted into an icon of a past era, into a white folks’ bogeyman, into a film star, and into a challenge for an ever-more inclusive, radical and powerful campaign for black liberation.

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<sup>69</sup> Davis, Ossie. “Eulogy.” Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://malcolmx.com/eulogy/>.

<sup>70</sup> Davis, “Eulogy.”

<sup>71</sup> Eboni Marshall Turman, “‘The Greatest Tool of the Devil’: Mamie, Malcolm X, and the PolitiX of Black Churches and the Nation of Islam in the United States,” *Journal Of Africana Religions*, vol. 3, no. 1 (January 2015): 131, accessed January 16, 2015. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/oar.2015.0006>.

<sup>72</sup> Leak, “Malcolm X and black masculinity in progress,” 61

<sup>73</sup> Turman, “The Greatest Tool of the Devil”, 131

The United States government has welcomed him onto postage stamps. Yet black feminism still grapples with the meaning and the utility of his legacy to their struggle, finding in it both consternation and motivation. In Beirut, Malcolm himself grappled with his own beliefs as they shifted beneath his feet. All the misogyny and orientalism that he had inherited from the West and from the Nation of Islam came up sharp against the lived experience of the hajj, and the real possibility of Black and Muslim international. It is by acknowledging and engaging with all the complexities and contradictions of Malcolm's life and work, and by peering in as far as we can, as Manning Marable urged, that a truer portrait of the man emerges. In this way too, his legacy can only be broadened and made more useful in serving the causes towards which his life was oriented.

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