Malcolm X was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1925 to Earl and Louise Little. He had several siblings, including three older, half sibling and a younger, half brother. Malcolm spent his childhood and adolescence in Omaha, Lansing, Boston, and New York City before his incarceration in the Massachusetts State Prison for larceny in 1946. He was released from prison in 1952 and began working with the Nation of Islam. This organization gave him an opportunity to hone his leadership skills and he rose rapidly through the ranks, becoming a valued lieutenant and surrogate son of Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad. Indeed, he became Muhammad’s spokesperson, minister-at-large, and agent. With his wife Betty Shabazz, Malcolm fathered six daughters: Attallah, Qubilah, Ilyasah, Gamilah, Malikah, and Malaak. Malcolm’s popularity and influence provoked petty jealousies and led to tensions with members of Muhammad’s Family. Rumormongering by these family members and other Nation of Islam officials, facilitated by the clandestine agent provocateurs of the FBI, drove a wedge between Malcolm and Muhammad. Muhammad suspended Malcolm, using the latter’s irreverent comments about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy as a pretext. Malcolm responded by denouncing the Nation of Islam; he also founded a rival organization, Muslim Mosque Inc., made the Hajj to Mecca, and converted to Sunni Islam. When he returned to America he founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity, which would serve as the political arm of his new revolutionary nationalist movement. Many people thought that Malcolm was on the cusp of his
most fruitful period of leadership. But before he could sink his teeth into the work of unifying a strong critique of white supremacy with a critique of American colonialism and capitalism (and, assuming his continued personal growth, a critique of the American gender system), he was assassinated on February 21, 1965. After his death, Malcolm became an icon for a younger generation of black radicals and revolutionaries. He is often viewed in tandem with Martin Luther King, Jr. as the Janus-faced presentation of leadership possibilities (“by any means necessary” or massive, nonviolent civil disobedience) in the black freedom struggle, during the middle of the twentieth century.

In this chapter and in chapter 3, I trace Malcolm’s Afro- Eccentric spirit using the Muslim categories of Jahiliyyah, Jihad, Hijrah, and Hajj.

**Ancestor Piety**

_Surah 24: Al-Nur (The Light)_

Or (the Unbelievers’ state) is like the depths of darkness in a vast deep ocean, overwhelmed with billow topped by billow, topped by (dark) clouds: depths of darkness, one above another: if a man stretches out his hands, he can hardly see it! For any to whom Allah giveth not light, there is no light!

_Qur’an 24:40_

Here is an enlightened, post-Jahiliyyah Malcolm reflecting on the darkness of his drug use:

Cocaine produces, for those who sniff its powdery crystals, an illusion of supreme well-being, and a soaring over-confidence in both physical and mental ability. You think you could whip the heavyweight champion, and that you are smarter than anybody. There was also that feeling of timelessness. And there were intervals of ability to recall and review things that had happened years back with an astonishing clarity. (AMX 155–6)

Long before cocaine gave Malcolm K. Little a false clarity—a pseudo-Enlightenment—and sent his life spiraling down a rat hole of criminality, he experienced a great trauma. His father, the Reverend Early Little died on an Omaha, Nebraska night in 1931. Was he murdered as Malcolm claims or was his death an unfortunate accident? Did he die at the hands of white men or is this the preferred memory of a man who even then suffered and would suffer again the closed fist