

Malcolm X and Mauthausen

Anti-Semitism, Racism, and the Reception of Malcolm X in the Austrian Muslim Youth

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Introduction

In 2019, the Austrian Muslim Youth (Muslimische Jugend Österreich, MJÖ), a multi-ethnic youth organization that was set up by young people in the 1990s, published the book *MuslimInnen gegen Antisemitismus: Gedenken. Begegnen. Bewegen* (“Muslims against Anti-Semitism: Remembering. Encountering. Moving”). The book was named after an eponymous two-year project of the MJÖ. One of the chapters is written by a long-time member and one of the original founders of the youth organization, Alexander Osman. The title of his chapter is “*Mühlviertler Hasenjagd, Malcolm X, and the Austrian Muslim Youth*”. Osman also served as an adviser to the project and took the opportunity to present a larger picture as to where this project is to be located in the history of the making of the MJÖ. The term *Mühlviertler Hasenjagd* literally means “Mühlviertel rabbit hunt”, a term that has its background in the final days of Nazi rule over Austria and is well-known to the average Austrian acquainted with local history.

The Mühlviertel rabbit hunt refers to the escape of 500 Soviet prisoners, who had revolted on 2 February 1945 and subsequently escaped from one of the six concentration camps of the Nazi regime, the Mauthausen concentration camp, which was located in the area of Mühlviertel in northern Austria. Following the escape attempt, soldiers and local Nazi organizations,

as well as local civilians, hunted down the escapees for three weeks. This resulted in the murder of 489 out of the 500 Soviet prisoners. A film about the *Mühlviertler Hasenjagd* was released in 1994 and, although being a local incident, it received prominence throughout the country in regard to the complex history of Nazism and Nazi war crimes in Austria. But how does the *Mühlviertler Hasenjagd* relate to Malcolm X (1925–1965)? These are not only two distant phenomena in terms of geography, but also presumably representative of two different stories in terms of actors, subjects, and objects.

This article explores the role of Malcolm X in the making of the MJÖ in relation to questions of anti-racist activism and the Austrian context of anti-Semitism.¹ I discuss the reception of Malcolm X and pose larger questions about the international struggle of people of colour, or what Sohail Daulatzai calls “the Black Muslim International”, a term he uses drawing on Aimé Césaire’s notion of the “compass of suffering” to “connect geographies of violence and shared territories of struggle against racial terror, global capital, and war”.² Based on the existing literature, I first present and summarize findings of previous studies regarding the influence of Malcolm X as a central figure in hip-hop culture for young people in Austria in the 1990s, who founded a lasting social movement, the MJÖ. Then, I move on to discuss the role of Malcolm X, drawing on an excerpt from the book mentioned above.³ Here, I also position myself as a scholar in relation to the MJÖ and this topic. I discuss the scope of reading Malcolm X’s life and legacy in the context of local histories of anti-Semitism, racism against Black people in the United States, and by extension how Malcolm X represents a central figure of the Black Muslim International.

By centering this article around a quote from a founding member of the MJÖ, I discuss how racism as a global structure is connected by these youth to their own local histories of racism. I elaborate on how members of the MJÖ connected the figure of Malcolm X with their local realities, but also

1. The questions are related to issues that some analysts argue can be framed within the concept of political theology. See Joel Kuhlin & Anthony Paul Smith, “The World is a Prison to Believers: Naming and Worlds in Malcolm X”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 96 (2020), 29–45; Emin Poljarevic, “The Political Theology of Malcolm X: Between Human Dignity and Returning the Gaze”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 96 (2020), 11–27.

2. Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom beyond America*, Minneapolis, MN 2012, xxii.

3. For further discussions on how Malcolm X is used by hip-hop artists in different geographical contexts, see Anders Ackfeldt, “The Semiotics of Malcolm X from Harlem to Tahrir”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 96 (2020), 47–60; Yolanda van Tilborgh, “Expressions of Political Theology in Art and Islam: Malcolm X-Inspired Transformations among Muslims in the US and the UK”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 96 (2020), 61–78.

how he re-entered the space of the MJÖ to gain more significance following the rise of anti-Muslim racism in Austrian society.⁴

From the *Mühlviertler Hasenjagd* to Malcolm X

It is useful to consider that Alexander Osman's commitment against racism and anti-Semitism in the history of the MJÖ is one element of the analysis in this article. His project was dedicated to reflecting upon the history of anti-Semitism in Austria and at the same time engaging in reasoning about some of the features of the contemporary expressions of anti-Semitism in the country.

Osman expresses a number of detailed ideas of how the Mühlviertel rabbit hunt is related to Malcolm X and the MJÖ:

We [the founders of the MJÖ] were impacted by the hip-hop movement and were interested in the Afro-American civil rights movement, reading the autobiography of Malcolm X and soon getting interested in the history of the Black Panther Party. The acquittal in the case of Rodney King following the documentation of police brutality did not only cause unrest in the USA. We were disturbed, disgusted and moved by this injustice and its consequences.

But it does not necessarily need a view overseas. Obviously, we never had a Ku Klux Klan and no riots. There were no panthers, no Mumia Abu Jamal to demand his release. But we, the founders of the MJÖ, were sensitized and sharpened in our view on our society with the help of the circumstances and happenings in the USA.

A whole generation of politically interested young people became witnesses of racially motivated riots in Rostock and Hoyerswerda. All of this was accompanied by the German rap sound of the 1990s, which made clear that youth sub-culture could have a political message.

During these days, many young people became politicized. It was a time of young people, neighbours, and classmates joining the radical right milieu. And it was the time, when the first arson attacks on asylum centres made headlines in northern Austria. Also, a series of letter bombs and a deadly attack in Oberwart happened.

4. For a discussion of how Malcolm X can be viewed as a "travelling model" with relevance in different local contexts, see Khairudin Aljunied, "A Travelling Model: The Mythicization and Mobilization of Malcolm X in the Malay World", *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 96 (2020), 79–94.

As a result, the anti-human spirit of racism and the social division, which one was familiar with in the case of Los Angeles, Rostock, or Solingen, was right on your doorstep.⁵

This quote – although short – is rather distinctive in giving a historical perspective and an outline of the making of the MJÖ. The text ought to be considered as a part of a larger project, namely a project by an Austrian Muslim youth organization to tackle anti-Semitism. In the case of Austria and Germany, one can unambiguously say that anti-Semitism is the widest acknowledged form of racism, a racism that has resulted in a historically unique act of annihilation, the systematic and industrial killing of six million Jews in concentration camps, to which the Mühlviertel rabbit hunt also relates. At the same time, it is significant to note that anti-Semitism has broadly been excluded from the definitions of racism in large parts of the German speaking world.⁶ In the imagination of many citizens, anti-Semitism stands on its own, unrelated to global structures of racism, especially colonization.⁷

It is also worth noting that there is some ambivalence in a project like this, given the attempt of centre-right and far-right politicians in Austria to oust members that have expressed anti-Jewish racism within their own ranks. This attempt goes hand in hand with transforming the problem of anti-Semitism into a Muslim problem. This is primarily done by promoting a discourse to problematize so-called “new (Muslim) anti-Semitism”. This is something which is not only an Austrian phenomenon but one that can be found in many Western European countries, such as France. This transformation and its underlying processes are not explicitly discussed in the text by Alexander Osman, but were clearly mentioned during the commencement of the project, which took place in the House of Europe, the European Commission’s representation in Austria.

Connecting some of the narratives of racism is an interesting political effort in itself, especially how they relate to the lifework of Malcolm X and its reception in the Austrian context. This is particularly relevant to how the MJÖ negotiated issues of identity and resistance to racism. In the following section, I take Alexander Osman’s text as a starting point in discussing the

5. Alexander Osman, “Mühlviertler Hasenjagd, Malcolm X und die Muslimische Jugend Österreich”, in *MuslimInnen gegen Antisemitismus: Gedenken. Begegnen. Bewegen*, Vienna 2019, 63–65.

6. Fatima El-Tayeb, “‘The Birth of a European Public’: Migration, Postnationality, and Race in the Uniting of Europe”, *American Quarterly* 60 (2008), 649–670.

7. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York 1973.

legacy of Malcolm X in a religious youth organization far away from the USA.

Previous research on the role of Malcolm X in the MJÖ has focussed on the ways in which Malcolm X was perceived by the founding members, namely as an enlightened believer, thinker, activist, and negotiator.⁸ The young people from the MJÖ drew from the idea of collective youth consciousness and shared Muslim identity, through which they connected to the idea of Malcolm X as a revolutionary and anti-racism activist in order to position themselves within the emerging global hip-hop youth culture in a European context.

The Austrian Muslim Youth

In 1995, a small group of seven young Muslim males between the ages of 13 and 19 came together with the goal to devote themselves to “Islamic” anti-racist activism. These young males were partly active in other political and cultural youth organizations. Beyond this, most of them were part of an emerging youth culture, the growing global movement of hip-hop, and came from the Austrian region of Mühlviertel. In 1996, they formed an organization, which three years later was rebranded from a local Islamic group to the Austrian Muslim Youth, the MJÖ. Their group did not focus on economic conflicts, but rather on topics such as identity, ethnicity, and religion.⁹

Following its expansion in the early 2000s, the MJÖ became the largest multi-ethnic, co-educational, German-speaking youth organization in Austria. Since its inception, it has presented the concept of an “Austrian Muslim identity” as the key idea to position its activism in Austria as a form of critique towards the first generation of Muslim leadership, which, according to them, did not care about local needs, and as a critique towards wider society, whose conception of national identity often served to exclude people of colour and Muslims from the narrowly-defined collective identity of “Austrians”.¹⁰

Like so many other movements around the world, the youth of the MJÖ became exposed to Malcolm X through hip-hop music. Hip-hop travelled from its homeland, the United States, to Austria, with all its its political

8. Farid Hafez, “From Harlem to the ‘Hoamatland’: Hip-Hop, Malcolm X, and Muslim Activism in Austria”, *Journal of Austrian-American History* 1 (2017), 159–180.

9. Donatella della Porta & Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., Oxford 2006, 25–28, 135–162.

10. Farid Hafez, “Whose Austria? Muslim Youth Challenge Nativist and Closed Notions of Austrian Identity”, *Anthropology of the Middle East* 12:1 (2017), 38–51.

potential.¹¹ As I have shown before in an article on Malcolm X, hip-hop, and Islamic activism in Austria, the founders of the MJÖ were highly exposed to African American culture, especially through music.¹² For them, Malcolm X – as revealed through his autobiography, the movie *Malcolm X* (1992) produced by Spike Lee, and, most importantly, music – played a particularly important role. These cultural productions opened up a new horizon of knowledge through which these young males were exposed to Malcolm X's African American experience in his many facets. As numerous scholars have shown,¹³ Malcolm X is not only central to music as “hip-hop's prophetic voice”,¹⁴ but he was also central to the spiritual foundations of the Zulu Nation, which is often referred to as the beginning of the early hip-hop culture.¹⁵ Hence, in the 1980s and 1990s, there was no hip-hop-culture without Islamicate contents and symbols, be it through Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam, the Five-Percenter Nation of Gods and Earths, or the sampling of Malcolm X's speeches.

I myself have also been part of this development. I was exposed to hip-hop music in my youth in the early 1990s and it was my encounter with the figure of Malcolm X through reading his autobiography at the age of 14, which brought me to join the MJÖ in 1998. Many years later, in 2014, I wrote a short biography on Malcolm X in German for young people. In many ways, I would call myself part of this “Generation Malcolm X”, which – as my global experience tells me – is a characteristic of a generation of young Muslims who grew up in the 1990s and became exposed to hip-hop youth culture. Although I left the MJÖ in 2007, shortly before I joined academia, and the history of the MJÖ was shaped by new generations of leadership, I am still somebody who is frequently invited to give talks, inform, teach, as well as listen to and learn from the young people of this organization through engaging with Malcolm X.

As much as Malcolm X's activism was central to the founding members of the MJÖ, his revolutionary potential decreased within the organization. The idea of an Austrian Muslim identity was further promoted, giving the organization less of an international profile. The Austrian political framework also led to a stronger integration of the MJÖ in the political system. Austria knows a high degree of institutionalization; the system of

11. Farid Hafez, “Political Beats in the Alps: On Politics in the Early Stages of Austrian Hip Hop Music”, *Journal of Black Studies* 47 (2016), 730–752.

12. Hafez, “From Harlem to the ‘Hoamatland’”.

13. Hisham D. Aidi, *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture*, New York 2014.

14. Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon*, 89.

15. Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon*, 113–114.

“social partnership” in Austria has the purpose of solving or neutralizing conflict by transferring conflicting social and economic demands to a set of institutions for resolution. Problems are often solved through semi-formal institutional rule-making, which leads the state to formally include different interests in ways that make it possible for administrative institutions to recognize them.

Austria has a strong state and incorporates diverse interests in its policy-making, including those of young people. The MJÖ has become a member of the Austrian National Youth Council (*Bundesjugendvertretung*), which formally represents the interests of young people in Austria *vis-à-vis* state institutions, and must be informed whenever laws that affect young people are decided, and is thus supported by the Austrian Ministry of Youth Affairs. This inclusion in the Austrian political system had the effect of educating a generation of young Muslims to expect that the political elite accepted them as part of the Austrian society. They could expect to be treated the same way as youth organizations from churches and political parties, which were older and had a longer history of sharing political and social power in the country. Hence, the idea of an Austrian Muslim identity in later years gave credit to this inclusion and was strengthened by the empowerment of young Muslims as Austrian citizens. The young Muslims could rely on the support of the state and were included in the political processes of participatory citizenship.¹⁶

Over time, the Austrian government shifted its long-term tolerant politics *vis-à-vis* Muslims, which also gave a reason to the MJÖ to take a fundamentally critical position against the government.¹⁷ For example, the organization framed its protest against the Islam Act in 2015, which was fundamentally considered as shifting Austria’s Islam-related policies from relative tolerance to a more discriminatory set of government procedures.¹⁸ The new state policies *vis-à-vis* Islam changed from cooperation with Muslim religious institutions to questioning constitutional rights such as freedom of religion and the equal treatment of all religious communities and churches before the law.¹⁹ This has meant that legal discrimination has also

16. Hafez, “Whose Austria?”

17. Farid Hafez & Reinhard Heinisch, “Breaking with Austrian Consociationalism: How the Rise of Rightwing Populism and Party Competition Have Changed Austria’s Islam Politics”, *Politics and Religion* 11 (2018), 649–678.

18. Rijad Dautovic & Farid Hafez, “Institutionalising Islam in Contemporary Austria: A Comparative Analysis of the Austrian Islam Act of 2015 and Austrian Religion Acts with Special Emphasis on the Israelite Act of 2012”, *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 8 (2019), 28–50.

19. Farid Hafez, “Muslim Protest against Austria’s Islam Law: An Analysis of Austrian Muslim’s Protest against the 2015 Islam Law”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 37 (2017),

brought racism back as a central issue for the country's Muslims in general and the MJÖ in particular.

The quote from Alexander Osman in a way connects different times and political spaces. Being a long-time affiliate in the MJÖ, I can personally relate to his thoughts on the past, having also conducted narrative interviews with him as one of the most important founders of the MJÖ. At the same time, "Muslims against Anti-Semitism" is a unique project, raised by a Muslim youth leadership that was largely socialized in a post-9/11 era, a time when the original comparably quite pro-Muslim state policy has given way to aggressive anti-Muslim legislation following the rise of the right-wing Freedom Party in the 2010s.²⁰

The Austrian Muslim Youth and Black Power

Osman says at the beginning of the excerpt that the founders of the MJÖ were heavily impacted by the hip-hop movement and connects this to the civil rights movement, linking Malcolm X's life to the history of the Black Panther Party. Indeed, as one of the interviews show, for the youth who established the MJÖ, Malcolm X's version of Islam became a third alternative between two unattractive options for these young Muslims at the time. Osman states: "From some inferiority complexes on one side, and a nostalgic national pride à la 'we are Ottoman', which I couldn't get into." But for others, a "connection between music and religion" was easy to infuse into the contemporary youth culture.²¹ Malcolm X's life – from a hair-straightening imitator of white people with an inferiority complex, to a self-confident leader of the African American community – was a powerful lesson in autonomy and self-liberation.²² For instance, the philosophy of Afrocentricity carries the idea of replacing African self-hate with African self-awareness and Blackpride.²³ This set of ideas came to be understood as a playbook to cope with one's own identity as a Muslim living in the West. While the Muslim heritage and identity was available in Austria in the 1990s, it was culturally insufficient and it did not resonate with these young people – Malcolm X's message did that. And even more than this, he showed a way out of the

267–283.

20. Hafez & Heinisch, "Breaking with Austrian Consociationalism".

21. Hafez, "From Harlem to the 'Hoamatland'", 171.

22. Emin Poljarevic, "Malik al-Shabazz's Practice of Self-Liberation", in Dustin J. Byrd & Seyed Javad Miri (eds.), *Malcolm X: From Political Eschatology to Religious Revolutionary*, Leiden 2016, 227–251.

23. Molefi Kete Asante, "Afrocentricity and Malcolm X", in Robert E. Terrill (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Malcolm X*, Cambridge 2010, 156; Poljarevic, "Malik al-Shabazz's Practice", 229.

destruictive state of mind – the inferiority complex, that presumably haunts some of the the young males.

Another member from the MJÖ's early days expressed the following: "Muslims [in the 1990s] were generally [regarded by society as] losers. To be Muslim, to be a foreigner, or to be black, and so on, was not cool. And suddenly it was all cool."²⁴ Malcolm X as an iconic figure, one whose speeches were sampled by famous rap-groups such as Public Enemy, A Tribe Called Quest, KRS-One, and others, articulated how active and young Muslims in the West were considered as unimportant and as a social nuisance, much like the African American youth in the urban US.

Malcolm X's relevance is embedded in an ambivalence of the Western cultural hegemony. Herein he was in conflict with a world that was governed by a white supremacist political power.²⁵ In other words, Malcolm X represents a seeker who is looking for a solid and authentic identity and at the same time a person who discovers the world beyond his cultural context. He was at the same time a product of a social, cultural, and political system shaped by white supremacy. This struggle was later translated into a part of the hip-hop culture that had transported his message, life story, and example, to the youth of the world. His life story therefore represents a version of western-based Islamic activism that is continuously communicated through the channels of hip-hop, which is recognized as important by young Muslims of colour.

When hip-hop music made Black people visible and central in American culture in the 1990s, for these young Muslims, Muslim identities were now identified with numerous positive traits: Western organizational forms, discipline, success, and the struggle for justice.²⁶ And all of this in the English language, the *lingua franca* of the latest imperial force in the world, the United States. There is an ambivalence in this process of diffusion of Malcolm X's messages. On the one hand, he arrived through the US cultural project of "coca-colonization", which made US culture the "second culture of nearly everybody" while on the other hand, he, as presented in hip-hop music, represents Black radicalism, internationalism, and thus an imagination of a world de-centred from the US empire.²⁷ Similar to jazz and the Black Arts Movement, hip-hop culture "became a space in which Black

24. Hafez, "From Harlem to the 'Hoamatland'", 170.

25. See Poljarevic, "The Political Theology of Malcolm X".

26. Bakari Kitwana, "The Challenge of Rap Music: From Cultural Movement to Political Power", in Murray Forman & Mark Anthony Neal (eds.), *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, New York 2002, 452–455.

27. Reinhard Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*, Chapel Hill, NC 1994, 82.

radicalism, Islam, and the Politics of the Muslim Third World” played a major role.²⁸ Hence, while embracing Black culture and a subversive countercultural force, it was still through the mechanisms of the dominant US culture. Embracing hip-hop meant embracing “Western culture”, no matter how critical its stance towards it was.

The MJÖ does not represent a commercial and superficial “pop-Islam”, but rather one which challenges social structures of inequality.²⁹ It is a historically informed movement that draws on Malcolm X not only as a religious pop star, but also as an educator, organizer, and activist. The horizons of the MJÖ founders were widened by critically discussing movements such as the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party. One founding member recalled his attraction to the Black Panthers: “The Black Panther Party also really impressed us because they organized themselves and showed a lot of discipline. And we also said: to be successful you need structure, you need discipline, you need proper task allocation.”³⁰ Malcolm X’s life story and activism has been considered as an introduction to racism and anti-racism in the United States. As the case of Rodney King (1965–2012) was mentioned by Osman, this shows that there was no post-racial imagination in place, but rather an understanding that racism and anti-racist struggle continue to shape contemporary societies in Europe and North America.

Today, this legacy of Malcolm X is still remembered. Malcolm X, although being of primary relevance to the founding members, is still held as an important figure in the social milieu of the MJÖ. Black History Month, which does not exist in Austria, has become a core part of the annual programme of the MJÖ. There is a Malcolm X week, which the MJÖ organizes around 21 February, the day Malcolm X was assassinated. They usually host the Spike Lee film along with lectures on Malcolm X and hip-hop. After I published my short biography on Malcolm X for young people, the MJÖ hosted several book talks throughout the country. During these talks, I tried to emphasize the global relevance Malcolm X still has today and connect his political activism with a global racial struggle, from the emergence of Black Lives Matter to the fight against anti-Muslim racism in Europe and Austria today. Hence, through his lifework and his commitment to fighting injustice, Malcolm X has continued to be taught and celebrated as an activist, cultural leader, and a role model by the MJÖ.

28. Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon*, 91.

29. Julia Gerlach, *Zwischen Pop und Dschihad: Muslimische Jugendliche in Deutschland*, Berlin 2006, 10–13.

30. Hafez, “From Harlem to the ‘Hoamatland’”, 177.

Global Racisms

As was seen in the initial quote, Alexander Osman saw that police brutality in the US led to reactions also in other parts of the world. Osman, although living as a young person in the Austrian countryside, felt connected to the plight of Black Americans. But going beyond the emotional aspect, he reveals that the examination of the Ku Klux Klan, a number of race-riots in urban areas across the US, and the incarceration of Black power activists such as Mumia Abu Jamal had the direct impact of sensitizing and sharpening his and MJÖ's collective views. The United States and its problem of racism were translated and connected to their own local stories. Similar observations can be made with hip-hop, especially in the genre of gangster rap and Black rappers in Austria, such as *Untergrund Poeten* (Underground Poets) in the 1990s, who tied their own experiences of police racism in Austria to the racism of the Ku Klux Klan.³¹ Likewise, Osman speaks of racially motivated riots in two German cities, Hoyerswerda and Rostock, and how these issues were covered in German rap music in the 1990s. He makes a discursive connection between the racism experienced in the United States and the racism in Germany, including in his own neighbourhood.

Osman thus connects different stories of racism and episodes of racist violence. More important is that all of this is done in the backdrop of publishing a piece on "Muslims against Anti-Semitism", connecting the concentration camps with Malcolm X through hip-hop music and with racial violence around the world. What Osman implicitly does is counteracting what I would call the externalization of anti-Semitism as a political phenomenon. The externalization of anti-Semitism is connected to different aspects of the neglect of racism in the German-speaking world.

Anthropologist Fatima El-Tayeb's research gives some support to Osman's analysis. First, she argues that one encounters a denial of the existence of racism in general, which is connected to the historical and scholarly neglect of racism in Germany from the colonial period (the era of German South West Africa) to the present.³² She further claims that Europe largely "continues to imagine itself as an autonomous entity [...] untouched by 'race matters' [...] a colorblind continent in which difference is marked along lines of nationality and ethnicized others are routinely ascribed a position outside the nation, allowing the externalization and thus silencing of a debate on the legacy of racism and colonialism". El-Tayeb also makes an argument

31. Hafez, "Political Beats in the Alps", 746.

32. Fatima El-Tayeb "Blood is a Very Special Juice': Racialized Bodies and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Germany", *International Review of Social History* 44 (Supplement 1999), 149–169.

that this can be achieved by excluding colonialism, which leads to the externalization of its postcolonial populations, from the list of key events that have shaped contemporary Europe.³³

Second, El-Tayeb connects the first set of arguments to the history of German *völkisch* anti-Semitism, which led to the annihilation of six million Jews during the Holocaust, initially resulting in a denial of guilt. This later led to depoliticization through the creation of a culture of remembrance in which *völkisch* anti-Semitism was framed as a singular phenomenon, without engaging in a critical reflection on contemporary racism in Germany. This is what Astrid Messerschmidt termed the post-National Socialism era in Germany.³⁴ For the Austrian case, where the country presented itself after 1945 as a collective victim of National Socialist Germany and which has since not fully come to terms with its history,³⁵ this is even more the case. Osman connects his perception of racism in the US and Germany with his lived experience in northern Austria. He expands thereby the perception of anti-Semitism as a singular and unique event in the history of Nazi rule in Germany and Austria to the larger world. This can also be interpreted as an attempt to construct a counter-narrative to the widespread externalization of anti-Semitism.

As noted by the sociologist and racism scholar William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868–1963), local forms of xenophobia are connected with each other. In 1952, following Du Bois' visit to Poland, especially the Warsaw ghetto, he wrote in the journal *Jewish Life* on his experience, that it

was not so much clearer understanding of the Jewish problem in the world as it was a real and more complete understanding of the Negro problem. In the first place, the problem of slavery, emancipation, and caste in the United States was no longer in my mind a separate and unique thing as I had so long conceived it. It was not even solely a matter of color and physical and racial characteristics, which was particularly a hard thing for me to learn, since for a lifetime the color line had been a real and efficient cause of misery. It was not merely a matter of religion. I had seen religions of many kinds – I had sat in the Shinto temples of Japan, in the Baptist chapels of Georgia, in the Catholic cathedral of Cologne and in Westminster Abbey. No, the race problem in which I was interested cut across lines of color and physique and

33. El-Tayeb, “The Birth of a European Public”, 658.

34. Astrid Messerschmidt, “Rassismusthematisierungen in den Nachwirkungen des Nationalsozialismus und seiner Aufarbeitung”, in Karim Fereidooni & Meral El (eds.), *Rassismuskritik und Widerstandsformen*, Wiesbaden 2017, 855–867.

35. Hella Pick, *Guilty Victims: Austria from the Holocaust to Haider*, London 2000.

belief and status and was a matter of cultural patterns, perverted teaching and human hate and prejudice, which reached all sorts of people and caused endless evil to all men. So that the ghetto of Warsaw helped me to emerge from a certain social provincialism into a broader conception of what the fight against race segregation, religious discrimination and the oppression by wealth had to become if civilization was going to triumph and broaden in the world.³⁶

In reverse, Osman challenges the social provincialism not of American perspectives, but of Austrian perspectives in linking Malcolm X with Mauthausen. By discussing Malcolm X together with Mauthausen, Osman shows that he is not trapped in the Austrian provincialism of reducing anti-Semitism to a history of Nazism or Christian anti-Judaism. This social provincialism is overcome by acquiring a broader conception of racism that connects Los Angeles with the German cities of Rostock and Solingen. And Malcolm X became a compass for finding an answer to this racism that was experienced at the hands of white supremacists in Austria.

Conclusion

The writings of Alexander Osman reveals the impact Malcolm X has had beyond the borders of the US. In the middle of the Alps, a small country in central Europe, a Muslim youth organization made an effort to connect itself with the world through hip-hop music and as a result, with Malcolm X. MJÖ youth, through reading, contemplating, and discussing Malcolm X's speeches, autobiography, and interviews, deepened their insights into their own experiences of racism. They connected their local experiences of racism to the United States' history of racism, as well as to the local Austrian history of racism. This is especially clear in how MJÖ youth connected the Austrian state and society's history of anti-Semitism under the rule of the Nazi regime to the contemporary struggles against racism in both the US and Austria. Malcolm X therefore symbolizes a central figure of a Black Muslim International.

Yet, at the same time, Malcolm X, as an iconic symbol for anti-racism, seems to be less important in times of political calmness. For instance, when the political establishment considered the MJÖ as a positive contributor to the Austrian civil society, and thus treated it as an equal partner organization alongside many other youth organizations, Malcolm X was not highlighted as a central symbol of anti-racist activism. It is only when the

³⁶. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *Writings by Du Bois in Periodicals Edited by Others: Vol. 4, 1945–1961*, Millwood, NY 1982, 175.

Austrian political elite changed its tolerant politics *vis-à-vis* Muslims that Malcolm X's lifework became important in fighting anti-Muslim racism. Malcolm X once more gained an iconic status, especially at the height of anti-government protests.

The MJÖ founder Alexander Osman challenges the social provincialism of Austrian perspectives on anti-Semitism by linking Malcolm X with Mauthausen, anti-Semitism with anti-Black racism, and the violence of the Ku Klux Klan in Los Angeles with racist arson attacks on asylum centres in Solingen, Germany. The MJÖ thus perceive racism as a global structure, clearly connected to their own local histories of racism. Malcolm X, who for Osman served as an inspiration in the early days of the founding of the MJÖ in the mid-1990s, was again invoked. And for Osman, Malcolm X seems to never have disappeared. In summary, Malcolm X, who had served as an educator, organizer, and activist in the early days, who stood for discipline, organizational skills, and integrity throughout the making of the MJÖ, served again as a link to bring together different worlds and collective experiences of anti-racist activism. ▲

SUMMARY

Malcolm X has an enduring significance in his political-religious youth activism for the Austrian Muslim Youth (*Muslimische Jugend Österreich*, MJÖ), the largest Muslim youth organization in Austria. This essay presents and summarizes findings in previous studies regarding the influence of Malcolm X in hip-hop culture and among young people in Austria in the 1990s, who founded a lasting social movement in 1995. The essay also discusses the lasting relevance of Malcolm X for a new generation of leaders in the MJÖ, who are annually paying tribute to him by discussing his life during the US-imported Black History Month. Based on my analysis of these events and in-depth interviews with the organizers, the essay discusses how Malcolm X was understood by young people of a religious youth organization.