

Malcolm X's different identities

By: Malek Kalhitmrawe

Supervisor: Ebere Nweze
Södertöms University | Institution for Culture & Learning
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Abstract

This essay will discuss Malcolm X and the multiple identities that he had during his short life. Malcolm X managed to achieve a lot during his short life and for some, he will always be remembered as a hero fighting social injustices and to others, he will be remembered as a radical leader. In order to evaluate Malcolm's different identities, I will look at his autobiography which was written together with the author Alex Haley. I want to take a look at Malcolm's different identities and to see what led him to change his identity multiple times. In order to help me to evaluate Malcolm's different identities, I will use Peter Burke and Jan Stets book, *Identity Theory*.

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1. A short Bio of Malcolm X

In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Malcolm tells us what he endured during his lifetime and that is both from various people he meets and from society in general. Throughout the autobiography, we see how Malcolm is being treated badly simply for the reason of him being black. The society that Malcolm grew up in was a racist one and black people in the US were facing racism everywhere they went. The racist society was in control and it formed the identity of black people. Society told the black people what they could do and what they could not such as not having the opportunity to have high paying jobs. A clear example of black people being treated differently than white people are the Jim Crow laws that existed. Even though Malcolm did not live in the Southern states that had Jim Crow laws, but the fact that these laws existed said a lot about the inequality that black people suffered in the US. For this essay, the main focus is to look what are the reasons for Malcolm changing his identity multiple times and what impact does the society have for him to change his identity multiple times.

Malcolm Little was born on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska. He was the fourth child in a family of seven children. Malcolm described his father as “My father, the Reverend Earl Little, was a Baptist minister a dedicated organizer for Marcus Aurelius Garvey’s U.N.I.A (Universal Negro Improvement Association)” (79). Malcolm described his mother as “Lois Little, my mother, who was born in Grenada, in the British West Indies, looked like a white woman” (80). She had a white father and that is the reason for Malcolm having reddish-brown skin color and being the lightest child in the family. Both parents taught their children about self-reliance and about being proud of their heritage and the color of their skin. By being a part of the U.N.I.A, the parents received threats from the Ku Klux-Klan and because of the threats the family relocated first to Milwaukee, Wisconsin and later on to Lansing, Michigan. In 1929 their house was burnt to the ground and Earl accused the racist group Black Legion of doing it has since they had harassed the family.

When Malcolm was six his father was killed. His death was officially ruled as a streetcar accident, but his mother believed he was murdered by the Black Legion who had been harassing the family. After Earl's death, Lois began talking to herself and “the state people saw her weakening” (98). They started to notice that she was not able to raise her children and she had a nervous breakdown in 1938. The breakdown leads to, “Eventually my mother suffered a complete break and the court orders were finally signed. They took her to the State Mental Hospital at Kalamazoo” (101). All of Lois children were put in different foster homes.

Despite being put in a foster home Malcolm performed very well in school and was even voted class president. He had a dream of being a lawyer but, dropped out of junior high school after a white teacher told him he could not become a lawyer because “A lawyer that’s no realistic goal for a nigger” (118). After dropping out of school at the age of 14, Malcolm lived with his half-sister Ella in Boston working with various jobs and in 1943 he moved to Harlem, New York City. In Harlem, he started dealing and using drugs and began doing robberies and together with four other associates they committed a series of burglaries against wealthy white families. In 1946 Malcolm was arrested for picking up a stolen watch that he had left in a repair store and he was sentenced to eight-to-ten years in Charlestown State Prison for larceny and breaking and entering.

In 1948 Malcolm’s brother Philbert wrote to him that he had discovered a “Natural religion for the black man” (248) and that it is something called the Nation of Islam. Malcolm' siblings had converted to Islam and they started to pray for him that he would also convert to Islam and Malcolm began to study Islam. The siblings were followers of Elijah Muhammed who they also referred to him as "The Messenger of Allah" (255) and they all urged Malcolm to accept teachings from Elijah Muhammed. Malcolm wrote to the leader of Nation of Islam Elijah Muhammad and Elijah wrote to him that he should give up his past and promise to not engage in that behavior ever again. In 1950 Malcolm changed his last name from Little to X because the X symbolized the African family name he could never know, and the X replaced Little which was enforced by the white slave master.

1.1 Political and Social Background

When Malcolm joined the of Nation of Islam he worked as a minister after Elijah Muhammed gave him that role and he was the national spokesperson for the group. Malcolm was a skilled speaker and when he was the minister for the group its membership increased rapidly, and Malcolm was the reason for that. He managed to recruit Cassius Clay now known as Muhammed Ali, and they became good friends. Malcolm described his first meeting with Cassius as, “I had met Cassius Clay in Detroit in 1962. Cassius came up and pumped my hand, introducing himself as he later presented himself to the world, I’m Cassius Clay” (413). Malcolm was tutored by the leader of Nation of Islam Elijah Muhammed and he taught Malcolm that the original man was black and that the white man has brainwashed the black man for hundreds of years. Elijah referred the black man as the original man and that the original man

had built great empires and civilizations. According to Elijah, “The devil white man, down through history, out of his devilish nature, had pillaged, murdered, raped and exploited every race of man not white” (256). By spreading the thesis that white people are devils and through these statements, people viewed the group as racist and that they spread hate. The group was against the Civil Rights Movement and its leader Martin Luther King since they spread love and peace using the Bible. In 1963, there was a rumor that the leader of the Nation of Islam Elijah Muhammed had affairs with secretaries of the Nation and this was a serious violation of what the Nation stands for.

Malcolm did not believe the rumor but, after talking with the secretaries of the Nation who made the accusation he believed them, and Elijah confirmed that the rumors were true. In the same year, the president of The United States John F. Kennedy was assassinated and Malcolm's comment on the assassination was that "the chicken has come home to roost" (411). His comment created an outcry by the American people and the Nation of Islam did not appreciate his comment and suspended Malcolm from talking in public for 90 days. Malcolm was told by Elijah about his punishment “I’ll have to silence you for the next ninety days – so that the Muslims everywhere can be disassociated from the blunder” (411).

Malcolm still had his ministerial role for the Nation but, this was the beginning of the end and in 1964 Malcolm decided to leave the Nation of Islam. After leaving the Nation of Islam Malcolm decided to do Hajj in Mecca and after the Hajj he changed his name to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. He still viewed himself as a Muslim and now he planned to organize a black nationalist organization for African-Americans and now he wanted to work with other civil rights leaders which, the Nation of Islam did not. After leaving the Nation of Islam Malik El-Shabazz joined the Civil Rights Movement in 1964 and he moved away from spreading religion and started to spread Black Nationalism.

According to Malcolm, “The goal has been always been the same, with the approaches to it as different as mine and Dr. Martin Luther King’s nonviolent marching, that dramatized the brutality and evil of the white man against defenseless blacks” (496). Malik El-Shabazz had started an organization for black nationalists and he was murdered in 1965 during a meeting for the organization by a member of the Nation of Islam. He was murdered before the autobiography was finished and Alex Haley managed to finish to book together with Malcolm’s wife Betty.

2. Methodology

In order to gather knowledge about Malcolm X my primary source, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* was written together with Alex Haley and the book was published the same year that Malcolm was murdered by members of the Nation of Islam. I want to analyze why Malcolm had different identities and to see what reasons he had for changing identities. Malcolm changes his name multiple times and I want to analyze what he is trying to tell us by changing his name. Why does Malcolm X change his identity multiple times? I will also look at how the autobiography can be used in school, for upper secondary school students. The other materials that are used in this study are articles that focus on Malcolm identity changes and his religious beliefs. They also focus on how he changed after leaving the Nation of Islam. When I will analyze my questions, I will also use the theory that I have selected for this essay which is *Identity Theory* by Peter Burke and Jan Stets.

3. Previous research

Much has been a lot written on Malcolm X and much of the scholarship focuses on how he changed his identity when joining the Nation of Islam. Scholars also focus on how Malcolm changed when he left the Nation of Islam and visited Mecca. Since Malcolm is a historical figure he often gets compared to other historical figures such as Benjamin Franklin which Carol Ohmann has written a scholarly article on.

In his article, “Malcolm X The destroyer and Creator of Myths”, Hank Flick, focuses on symbolic themes concerning black people and “Such themes were labeled by him as myths” (166).

There are three myths according to Flick that Malcolm identified, and the first myth is that blacks were animals; the second myth is that blacks were a minority, and the third one is that integration was a concept that was supported by many black people in the US. Flick tries to answer these myths by looking at what Malcolm said on these themes from various interviews and speeches.

In many of Malcolm’s speeches, he mentioned how black people arrived in the US and that they arrived chained in a slave ship like animals and that black people were dehumanized in a way that they were sold as animals. He described the arrivals such as, “You came here on a slave ship. In chains, like a horse, or a cow, or a chicken” (167-168). Blacks were labeled as the beasts of the field and this created a situation that black people were viewed as animals and that white people were superior to them. This was the American version of apartheid. Christianizing black people and controlling the language also

supported the myth that black people were animals. The control of language was a tactic to manipulate black people in the use of the language. According to Flick, "The myth that blacks were animals originated in white America's use, abuse, and control of language" (169). Black people were taught to reply in a certain way to white labels as if they were true. The second myth was that black people were a minority, which they still are today in the US if you look at the number of citizens that are black compared to the white citizens. What Malcolm meant when he referred blacks as a minority is that blacks know their place in society and that since they are a minority they would have to pay a heavy price to survive. According to Malcolm, "Blacks were expected (1) to know their place and not deviate from it (2) to rationalize their treatment along the lines that a minority will always have to pay a heavy price in order to survive within a larger commonwealth" (173). Even though slavery ended it did not mean black people had been integrated into the mainstream rather, they had remained a minority. Malcolm claimed that "the American stage is a white stage. So, a black man standing on that stage in America is in the minority. He is the underdog" (173).

He encouraged blacks to drop their minority status and to look at a world stage where the white man is the minority. The last myth is that a majority of blacks supported the concept of integration. "He articulated a position that integration was a myth, a false solution, a panacea that had served to deceive blacks and reinforce white superiority" (175). Malcolm saw it as a way of reducing blacks to the level that they had to depend on the white man, which made the white man superior. Blacks were integrated into institutions such as schools and unions and this became interracial with black and white people mixed together, which seemed to be beneficial for blacks. Malcolm did not believe in this solution and he claimed that this "will not solve our problem. This is a false solution, a "token solution" (176). Malcolm was against black people being integrated into a white society and he viewed it as "Integration, as practiced within America, was pictured by Malcolm as having a purpose of reinforcing among blacks and white the superiority of the latter and the inferiority of the former" (176).

Bill Yousman's article "Who Owns Identity? Malcolm X, Representation, and the Struggle Over Meaning" focuses on the legacy that Malcolm left behind. Yousman examines how Malcolm X became a point of engagement in an ideological war between blacks and whites in the US. Malcolm was viewed as a fanatic by the American press, "Malcolm X was treated as a fanatic by the American press during his lifetime. The tendency is not surprising because in his speeches Malcolm X questioned the structure and integrity of American society itself" (2). However, something changed ever since his autobiography was released as a lot of undergraduate and high school students are required to read the book. Long after his death Malcolm is still alive as a signifier in representations in the media and culture and Malcolm X

is viewed as a struggle of meaning and the “X” is hard to interpret and who can identify themselves with the symbol and why. Yousman uses Bruce Perry’s “Malcolm X: A man who changed black America” in trying to answer questions that are raised from Malcolm autobiography and Perry looks at Malcolm’s relationship with family and the fact that Malcolm changed his last name to X and he also believes that Malcolm’s rage on how black people were treated in the American society had to do with Malcolm was angry about how his family raised him.

Yousman criticizes Perry’s thoughts, “Perry himself becomes only a shadow in this account; it is not his construction of Malcolm X that is developed from his research, but rather the testimony and documentation itself that “reveals” a Malcolm X that even Malcolm X did not know” (12). Perry tries to fix Malcolm’s meanings and he believes that he knows Malcolm X better much more than Malcolm X knows himself. Perry tries to change the image of Malcolm X by correcting the story of his life that he tells us from his autobiography. There is a battle as to who the real Malcolm X is and the meaning of his image.

In her article "The Autobiography of Malcolm X, A mythic paradigm", Nancy Clasby's uses Frantz Fanon's work on native people whose country had been colonized by white settlers and compares it to black people's experience in America. She draws a comparison between natives who suffered injustice from white settlers to black people suffering injustice in the US and that both groups suffered so many injustices that it harmed their development. The black man is viewed as invisible when it comes to Western culture and blacks have been locked out from history and Nancy looks at three periods of Malcolm's life where he develops to become a new man. When Malcolm X grew up he was Malcolm Little, and he grew up in a world where racism towards black people was common. Black and white people were divided into different institutions and Malcolm grew up with parents that had different views on him.

According to Clasby, “One parent was black and favored him because he was light. The other was almost white and beat him to exorcise the hated whiteness” (21). The second phase of his life began when he was sent to prison for burglary and in prison, he began to change, and he stopped eating pork and became a Muslim. He began writing letters to Elijah Muhammed and Elijah told him that the white man is the devil and from there he focused his anger towards white men and the system that they created. This is a starting point for Malcolm towards writing his own history. According to Fanon, “Decolonization, says Fanon, is always a violent phenomenon. Resistance breeds violence, violence breeds further resistance, and when the tensions within have reached a certain level, some men, like

Malcolm X, come to prefer victory to survival” (24). Malcolm's struggles in life transformed him and he is a part of history which, is characterized by resisting and fighting injustices. The last phase is when Malcolm visited Mecca and he had moved on from the Nation of Islam and left behind their old views and there he became El Hajj Malik El Shabazz. Malcolm underwent his own internal revolution and after he returned to the US, he created the organization Afro-American Unity with the experience he got from visiting Africa. Clasby describes Malcolm's return to the US as “Malcolm went back into the ghetto to form the Organization of Afro-American Unity, a revolutionary brotherhood and a new model for a human and spiritual society” (32). When he visited Africa, he learned about brotherhood and started a black revolution where the old Malcolm is gone and a new one has arrived.

In his article “The Semiotics of Salvation: Malcolm X and the autobiographical self”, Bashir M. El-Beshti focuses on how an autobiography is characterized by the identity of the person whose story is being told and the voice of the person who is telling the story. He calls it double focus and he looks at Malcolm's different identities from his younger days where he transformed from a criminal to become religious. According to El-Beshti, “There is Malcolm in all his various guises and transformations- Malcolm Little, Mascot, Homeboy, Detroit and Harlem Red, Satan – and Malcolm the authorial speaking voice” (359). Bashir sees Malcolm's story is not a unique one and that he is a black man who shared his experience with other black men and in his article, focuses a lot on Malcolm's Muslim faith and how he emerges from Mecca as a newly integrated human being. He views the book as a bildungsroman where Malcolm searches for life questions and he gains experience and knowledge from the world after his visit from Mecca where he got a new identity. The new identity that Malcolm gets after visiting Mecca was far from being his final identity and that it should be viewed as "the last one in the series of roles that Malcolm X had variously assumed, lived out, and discarded” (360).

Even though he changed identities after leaving the Nation of Islam and he went to Mecca Malcolm X still believed that his life somehow was shaped by the will of Allah. The Nation of Islam's views of Islam and orthodox Islam is different, and he did not change his belief that one's life is written. El-Beshti views it as “Each moral crisis Malcolm undergoes not only culminates in the emergence of a new Malcolm, a transformed man but also signals towards his final destiny” (363). Malcolm looked back at the time when he was a criminal, selling and using drugs he saw that it was a step towards realizing that destiny. Every step that Malcolm took in his life he praises Allah for every step, even the steps he took when he was a criminal. When joining the Nation of Islam Malcolm gained confidence from Elijah Muhammed but, after Elijah's scandal, Malcolm saw Elijah as a man who robbed the Nation of Islam of having any meaningful political significance. Malcolm dedicates a lot to Elijah Muhammed and the

autobiography Malcolm dedicates it to Elijah Muhammed for founding him in a filthy civilization and making him clean. The filthy civilization was created by the white man and it was filthy because of its treatment towards black people. What made it also filthy was the fact that black people forced to become Christians and Malcolm was anti-Christianity.

In Carol Ohmann's article "The Autobiography of Malcolm X: A revolutionary use of the Franklin tradition", she compares Malcolm X's autobiography with that of one of the founding fathers of the United States, Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. Both autobiographies resemble each other's lives in the two categories men and events in a standard which they judge them and looking back in their own life as autobiographers do. Both of them allow us to see into their earlier lives when they were young men, and both have similar experiences. Ohmann compares both men as "Both Franklin and Malcolm X admire men who make a conquest of the external or material world; who learn its principles and use them to practical ends, who solve problems and make things" (135). Both men were journeymen who left their home at an early stage of their lives because they saw that there was little opportunity for success.

Where both autobiographies differ is when Malcolm visited Mecca and went with the pilgrims. Malcolm here feels a connection with other people and he feels free from limits from the black and white division and has the power to express his feeling. According to Ohmann, "The similarity between the autobiographies of Franklin and Malcolm X points finally, then, to common areas of experience and suggests that, black and white, we share a common problem: to render human or humane the ideas by which we have traditionally shaped ourselves and our programs or institutions" (148). After visiting abroad Malcolm changed his attitudes towards his main objective; black nationalism and he preached for black nationalism and it is still necessary as long as the black race is inferior in the society. The ultimate goal he had for the organization that he created right before his assassination was that the Afro-American Unity was an all-black organization which helps to create a society with an honest black-white brotherhood.

4. Theoretical framework

As I stated earlier, this essay will focus on Malcolm X's different identities and in order to evaluate his different identities, I will use Peter Burke's and Jan Stets's work *Identity Theory*. "...An important reason behind writing this book at this time is to give scholars within sociology and across the social sciences a clear and organized statement on identity theory in sociological social psychology" (7). The

book focuses on how the individual person and society are linked together in identity and it also looks at individuals' behavior which helps us understand the individual.

According to Burke and Stets, "An identity is the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person" (3). This means that individuals apply themselves to roles that they occupy such as students and workers but, it also applies to ethnicity and political parties. People have numerous identities because they are members of several groups. They view identity theory as "Identity theory seeks to explain the specific meanings that individuals have for the multiple identities they claim; how these identities relate to one another for any one person; how their identities influence their behavior, thoughts, and feelings or emotions; and how their identities tie them in to society at large" (3). Something that is central to identity theory is the relationship between the person and the agent and "In identity theory, an identity is an agent.

Each person has many identities" (8). The authors focus on symbols and a symbol can have different meanings depending on which culture interpreted the symbol and a symbol could be one word or more. "Different symbols may have the same meaning, or the same symbol may have different meanings in different contexts" (11). The meaning of a symbol is defined by society and the symbols are related to social groups and language communities. "Language is symbolic communication" (11) and every person is a producer and a hearer of language. When it comes to symbols most of the communication is between persons who have different statuses in groups and organizations.

If you try to analyze a person you can look at its behavior and the behavior of the person can be linked to its role that it has in a group or organization. Burke and Stets argue the role of a person as "the interaction is thus not between whole persons but between aspects of persons having to do with their roles in the groups or organizations: their identities" (12). In identity theory, the identity meanings can always change but, Burke and Stets view the change as a very slow one. Burke and Stets claim that "the change in identity meanings is not noticeable expect over longer periods ranging from weeks to months or even years" (176). Identities are viewed as fluid and changing and "The meaning in identity standards do change, but as a general rule, they change very slowly" (176). According to Burke and Stets, there are four sources of change when it comes to identity change and the first one is changed in the situation; the second one is identity conflicts, and the third one is identity standard and behavior conflicts and the last one is negotiation and the presence of others. Burke and Stets claim that the first source is ... "the first source of identity change we consider is the result of changes in a situation that disrupt meanings

controlled by an identity in such way that the changes cannot be countered by actions on the part of lower identity” (180). By changing your situational meanings, it creates a discrepancy between what the standard meanings of the identity are and what your new self-relevant meanings stands for. This discrepancy can create stress for people and they can feel uncertain. According to Burke and Stets, “The only thing that can reduce the discrepancy is for the identity standard to change to match the situational meanings” (180). When this happens, the discrepancy will disappear and the stress that exists will go away.

...”A second source leading to identity change exists when people have multiple identities that are related to one another in the sense that the standards of each contain the same dimensions of meaning” (183). The identities belong to different levels and all of the multiple identities are simultaneously activated. A common identity conflict is between role conflict and status inconsistency and “Such conflicts between two identities may come about as a person takes on new role identities” (183). “The third source of identity change is a conflict between the meanings of one’s behavior and the meanings in the identity standard” (184). Normally people’s behavior is consistent with the identity that they have but, “We cannot always choose the behaviors and meanings we wish” (184-185). There could exist situational reasons for people to behave in a certain way because it is conflicting with their own identity. The authors argue that ...”one reason may be that a behavior is at odds with one identity but in accord with another in the case of conflicting identities (185). The authors see another reason for people's behavior and that is that they do not the consequences of their behavior.

The last source is “the fourth source in which identities’ change can be seen as part of an adaptive strategy inherent in identities that helps them establish what we have called mutual verification contexts” (185). An example of mutual verification contexts is in a situation where identities of everyone that is participating in the situation do not only verify their own identity but, also to help the other people that are participating to verify their identities. By taking a role in the process an identity is formed and an example of a process is role-taking. For example, if a child is crying when a parent takes the role to make the child to stop crying. Burke and Stets believe that “through this role-taking, the comes incorporate expectations of the parent within itself and through this comes to have its identity modified to include these expectations as standards” (186). They add that “taking the role of the other is the source of that understanding that becomes incorporated into the identity as a set of standards or guidelines for assessing (perceiving) one’s own behavior” (186). There is a mechanism for which identities to adapt to the social situation and that is to take the role of the other. In this context, it will create a mutual verification of the persons own identity.

5. Analysis

Malcolm Little grew up in a society where black people were viewed as second-class citizens and did not have the same rights as white people did. The American system was against black people and one of the reasons was that Jim Crow laws existed in Southern states where a lot of black people lived. That led to segregation with white people and black people having different types of rights in the society but, black people were tired of being second-class citizens and they wanted change. They had activist groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who had members that were a part of the Civil Rights Movement such as the leader Dr. Martin Luther King.

Malcolm had a turbulent childhood because, of his father who was a member of a black activist group U.N.I.A. Since he was a member of the group the family received threat from racist groups such as Ku Klux-Klan and the Black Legion and with the threats that the family received they had to move to different cities to get away from the racist groups. Malcolm described it as “Soon, nearly everywhere my father went, Black Legionnaires were reveling him as an ‘uppity nigger’ for wanting to own a store, for living outside the Lansing Negro district for spreading unrest and dissension among the good niggers” (80). The threats became real when the Black Legion members burned down the family’s house and later on murdered Malcolm’s father. This was common for black people during the 20th century in the US. Black people in general were racially abused by the society and for the people fighting for equal rights received numerous threats by racist groups.

Black men such as Malcolm’s father were trying to improve black people’s rights in society and it went so extremely bad that he was killed for doing that. The US was so divided at that time that practically every city had a Negro district and black people had to live there. If you did not live in the Negro district you would get racially abused almost every day such as Malcolm’s father got. After the father was murdered Malcolm’s mother had a nervous breakdown and people working for the state decided that she was not capable to raise her children, so they were sent to different foster homes. Despite being sent to a foster family Malcolm performed well in school and he became popular among his classmates. In school Malcolm was described “as the “nigger” of my class, I was in fact extremely popular – I suppose partly because I was kind of a novelty” (109). Malcolm was asked by a teacher if he had any thoughts on what he wanted to work with when he grew up and Malcolm answered that he wanted to become a lawyer. The teacher responded with “A lawyer that’s no realistic goal for a nigger” (118) and was something that was common in the US back then. Black people did not have the same opportunities as white people

did and they struggled to find their own identity. Burke and Stets acknowledge identity as, “An identity is the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society” (Burke & Stets 3) and in the American society back then they had decided the identity of black people that they were only “Negros”. Identity is defined with what your occupation is and no matter what occupation a black person may have had in the US they would still have the identity that they are a “Negro”. After finishing the eighth grade Malcolm quit school and moved to Boston to live with his sister Ella and in Boston Malcolm started looking for a job. While living in Boston, Malcolm got the temptation to visit Harlem, New York which is very close to Boston and the reason for wanting to go Harlem is because of his father description of it. His father described Harlem as a district with pride and that there were parades by Harlem followers of Marcus Garvey.

Malcolm had no money, so he needed a job and his sister Ella managed to get him a job working on a train as a dishwasher. One-night Malcolm walked around Harlem at night seeing bars filled with black people, people gambling illegally and seeing prostitutes everywhere. Malcolm liked what he saw and described it as "But that night, I was mesmerized. This world was where I belonged. On that night I had started on my way to becoming a Harlemlite" (160). That night Malcolm found a home and decided that he wanted to become a hustler and Harlem was the place for doing that. He described Harlem and New York as "But New York was heaven to me. And Harlem was Seventh Heaven" (162). Now that he was a hustler he got a new nickname Red and he got it because he had reddish-brown hair.

Malcolm changed his hairstyle to conk which was a popular hairstyle among African-Americans during the beginning of 20th century. Here Malcolm changed his identity when he became a hustler and that was common for young black men. Young black men such as Malcolm grew up with a dream of becoming a lawyer but, growing up in a racist society denied that dream. Black people did not have many choices when it came to jobs and the jobs that black people got were for the most part low paying jobs such as Malcolm working as a dishwasher on a train. With little opportunities for getting a good and well-paid job, many black people such as Malcolm became criminals. Burke and Stets wrote about symbols and that a symbol is defined by society and Malcolm becoming a hustler is a symbol that this is the only way for him to get a profession that pays well. By changing his hairstyle to conk is also a symbol that the white identity is superior to the black one and it was common for black men to have that hairstyle, so they could look whiter. Here we see how the racist American system is so strong that black people were changing their looks just to look white. It did not matter that black men such as Malcolm changed their hair color, they would still be judged by the color of their skin and be viewed as “Negro”. Malcolm was arrested in 1946 and was sent to eight-ten years in prison and here he became a changed

man. While being in prison there was not much to do for Malcolm, so he started to attack the Bible and God and led to him getting a new nickname. Other prisoners viewed Malcolm as "eventually, the men in the cellblock had a name for me: Satan. Because of my antireligious attitude" (246). This was nothing new for Malcolm because when he grew up he was disliked the Christianity despite that his father was a Baptist preacher and "even at that young age, I just couldn't believe in the Christian concept of Jesus as someone divine" (83). His attitude towards Christianity was always the same from when he was a little boy to when he became an inmate.

Throughout his life, Malcolm never changed his attitude towards Christianity because he always saw a connection between Christianity and white supremacy since white people forced black people to become Christians. At the same time, Malcolm's siblings found a new religion Islam and told Malcolm that Islam is a "Natural religion for the black man (248) and Malcolm was given instructions on what he should do to become a Muslim such as stop smoking and stop eating pork. Malcolm's siblings had converted to Islam and they started to pray for him that he would also convert to Islam and Malcolm began to study Islam. The siblings were followers of Elijah Muhammed who they also referred to him as "The Messenger of Allah" (255) and they all urged Malcolm to accept teachings from Elijah Muhammed. Malcolm accepted Elijah Muhammed's teachings and now he was a Muslim and a member of the Nation of Islam.

After being imprisoned, Malcolm now had changed his identity from being a hustler and criminal to be a religious man and a Muslim. With his new identity, Malcolm received new knowledge from Elijah on how the world was constructed as ... "history had been 'whitened' in the white man's history books, and that the black man had been 'brainwashed for hundreds of years'. Original man was black" (256). Elijah referred the black man as the original man and that the original man had built great empires and civilizations. Elijah described white men as, "The devil white man, down through history, out of his devilish nature, had pillaged, murdered, raped and exploited every race of man not white" (256). Malcolm identity now was not only a Muslim identity but, now he had an anti-white identity. With being taught that the slave masters also injected Christian religion to the black people and taught them to worship an alien God that had the same looks as the slave masters his hatred for Christianity increased. It was because of these thoughts of white people that viewed Malcolm and the Nation of Islam as radicals. Elijah said that white people brainwashed black people but, in fact, you can also say that Elijah brainwashed his members and Malcolm with hate. The religion of Islam is about peace and love but, Elijah did not only teach Malcolm that. He taught him to hate and I believe the reason for that is the racist society that they lived in. If you have been mistreated your whole life for the reason of your color

skin it is common that you develop a hatred for those who have been mistreating you. That led to Malcolm taking action such as changing his last name and after joining the Nation of Islam Malcolm changed his last name from Little to X. According to Malcolm, “The Muslim’s X symbolized the true African family name that he never could know. For me, my X’ replaced the white slavemaster name of ‘Little’ which some blue-eyed devil named Little had imposed upon my paternal forebears” (296). By changing his last name to X, Malcolm now released the slave name Little and now he viewed himself as a black man free from slavery. Here we can clearly see how the racist American society has affected black people for centuries. They changed their names and forced them to become Christians. By forcing them to become slaves, the slaveowners did not only change their identity but, they manage to delete their old ones. As Malcolm said he could never know what his true African family name was, and he decided to have the letter X as the last name.

After being released from prison Malcolm started to recruit black people to join the Nation of Islam and with his fine work, Elijah named Malcolm assistant minister of the Detroit Temple. With his new role as minister, Malcolm used a tactic when he tried to recruit black people and that is to first talk negatively on Christianity and then tell that there is a special religion for the black man that is Islam. While the Nation of Islam grew it received a lot of hate from the media and newspapers “First came the white newspapers – features writers and columnist: ‘Alarming’, ‘hate-messengers’, ‘threat to the good relations between the races’, ‘black segregations’, ‘black supremacists’ and the like” (340). With all of the negative press that the group got Malcolm could not take it and decided that he had to return fire with fire and his hatred for the white race grew. Malcolm claimed that “The white man so guilty of white supremacy can’t hide his guilt by trying to accuse The Honorable Elijah Muhammed of teaching black supremacy and hate” (342). Here Malcolm’s hate for white people was so strong that he could not respond to the media in a different way.

The group faced a lot of heat from the media for spreading hate on both white people and black people who were Christians. The Nation of Islam made it easy for the media to criticize them, and since Malcolm was a minister at that time he was a big reason for it. Once again, the society and the media give black people an identity and this time they gave the members of the Nation of Islam the identity that they were black supremacists. In fact, if you look at the Nation of Islam’s views on black people who were Christians they were trying to undermine them, and Nation of Islam viewed themselves as better people because they were not brainwashed. In this case, the media was right because of hate that the Nation of Islam spread. In 1961 Elijah Muhammed's condition got worse and rumors began to spread the minister Malcolm would take over the Nation of Islam and he has taken the credit for Elijah

Muhammed's teachings. Malcolm had enough of the rumors and decided to leave the Nation of Islam. After leaving the Nation of Islam Malcolm decided to do Hajj in Mecca and after the Hajj he changed his name to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. After he came back from his trip overseas Malik El-Shabazz was a changed man and had a new identity. In Mecca, he saw that there were Muslims that were not only black but, they were white, brown, red and yellow and they believe in the same God. Malcolm described it as “packed in the plane were white, black, brown, red, and yellow people, blue eyes and blond hair and my kinky red hair – all together, brothers!” (436). He saw them as brothers despite the color of their skin.

The meetings that Malcolm held every Sunday when he had returned was not about religion, it was about black people in America. His identity was now changed from a person who spread hate and tried to divide black people to a person who focused on Black Nationalism. Now he set aside religion and focused on the black people who have been deprived of their civil rights and their right to have human dignity. He wanted to change the racist American society and the way to do that was with the direction of Black Nationalism. Malcolm also adds that the paths that the black man has followed have failed him; the leaders and Christianity have failed him. In Mecca Malcolm for the first time saw himself as a complete human being and he looked back at the time when he was a member of the Nation of Islam following their leader Elijah Muhammed. He believed in Elijah as a divine leader and as a person that had no weaknesses and that Elijah could not be wrong or make any mistakes. Malcolm still had great respect for Elijah Muhammed but, he wanted to go in a path of Black Nationalism. The inspiration for going in the path of Black Nationalism comes from Marcus Garvey teachings and Malcolm's father was also a believer in Garvey's teachings.

Garvey taught that the black race should get up from its knees and stand up on its feet and be ready to take a stand for itself. Malcolm had started an organization for black nationalists and he was murdered during a meeting for the organization by members of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm search for an identity can be tracked back from his childhood. With his father passing away when Malcolm was only six years old affected him because he did not grow up with a father figure. He did not grow up with his parents or his siblings, instead, he grew up in a foster home and despite growing up in a foster home he performed well in school but, his dream of becoming a lawyer was crushed by his teacher. After having his dream crushed he moved to sister Ella in Boston but, he had no idea of what he wanted to become, and he remembered his father telling him about the district Harlem, New York. Still searching for an identity, Malcolm visited Harlem and after seeing the district at night he found his identity that he wanted to be a hustler. When he was active as a hustler committing crimes, he still lacked a father figure

and after he went to prison he found one, Elijah Muhammed. Elijah's teachings managed to set Malcolm straight and he converted to Islam. With converting to Islam Malcolm found an identity that he would hold on to for the rest of his life, and that is why he was always grateful to Elijah Muhammed. He was also taught to hate the white man and it can be related to what Burke and Stets talked about having multiple identities activates simultaneously. He changed his last name from Little to X to show that he was free from slavery since the name Little was a slave masters name. Malcolm got a role as a minister by Elijah Muhammed and his behavior changed with spreading hate about white people and Christianity.

This change of behavior can be traced back to what Burke and Stets said that behavior can be linked to what role a person has in an organization or group. "The interaction is thus not between whole persons but between aspects of persons having to do with their roles in the groups or organizations: their identities" (Burke & Stets 12). After spending years as a minister for the Nation of Islam Malcolm decided to leave the group and he went on a trip to Mecca to do Hajj. In Mecca, he became a changed man with a new identity and saw people of different races. It opened his eyes that there were Muslims of all races and he began to change. The biggest change that he makes is when he returned to the US and creates an organization for black nationalists. Here he unites black people no matter their religious beliefs. Richard describes Malcolm's visit to Mecca as a place where he found unity among no matter what color of skin people had and "the varied physiognomic elements that so incisively define racial division in the United States" (Richard 578).

Malcolm saw the unity that existed in Mecca and that was something that he now wanted back home in the US. The first thing Malcolm said is that he now puts religion on the side and will focus on Black Nationalism. He wanted to unite black people to fight together against their common enemy, the government that has not helped black people. Phillip M. Richard describes Malcolm as "Malcolm channeled the skills gained from observation of others into the effective recruitment of potential activists, ministers, and leaders" (Richard 574). Malcolm looked at leaders such as Marcus Garvey and Elijah Muhammed and trying to use the same skills as they had in recruiting members. That lead to him starting an organization that was similar to the one that his father followed which was led by Marcus Garvey. He had made peace with Martin Luther King and saw how millions of people followed the Civil Rights Movement that spread love and Malcolm wanted to be a part of that. In the end, he found what I believe to be the true identity that he wanted to be a leader that united all black people no matter what religious beliefs a person may have had. Richard claims that Malcolm used Black Nationalism as a revolution for black people to raise themselves to human statues to end the white supremacy. In fact,

Malcolm did use it as a weapon but, he did not get a chance to use it for a long time since he was murdered shortly after he created his organization for black nationalists.

Throughout the autobiography, Malcolm tells us his life story and I feel that he is telling the whole story of his life. He was proud of his past and that all the actions that happened during the beginning of his life helped him to what he became right before his death. Malcolm described how he engaged with the society that he grew up in and explains how the life of black people was in the US. After traveling abroad, he saw how people could unite no matter the color of their skin and in the end, he wanted that unity to exist in the US as well.

6. An implication for education

Teaching *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is beneficial, and it will educate pupils in many different ways. In this segment, I will present some of my ideas on how teachers can integrate the autobiography in their teaching.

In Swedish schools, it is very common that the books that pupils read are fiction since it is a demand from Skolverket “Literature and other fiction” (Skolverket 3). In this segment during the semester, pupils get to read “classics” and acquire knowledge about famous writers. Books that are used in school are often written by white males. It is very rare that teachers select autobiographies when they are choosing a book that pupils will read. Malcolm X’s autobiography is written together with Alex Haley and both of them are black men. If a teacher uses this autobiography, it will bring something different to the classroom since it is an autobiography that is written by two black men. The autobiography is also from a time period where black people in the US suffered from oppression by a racist society. With the autobiography, there is a possibility for pupils to have discussions on postcolonialism and how it affected black peoples search for an identity. Introducing and using *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in the classroom would be an opportunity for pupils to broaden their image of the world since the autobiography is written by two black men.

I believe that this autobiography will challenge pupils in different ways. If the autobiography is read as a bildungsroman about a young black man growing up in a racist society in the US. There are many different ways pupils can react to Malcolm’s story about his life and I believe that this autobiography may move most of the pupils. By reading the autobiography pupils will encounter a lot of cultural and

social issues that black people in the US dealt with every day. They will encounter issues such as: effects of colonialism, white people vs black people, Christians vs Muslims etc.

The plot of the book is heavy since there are some cultural and social issues that can bother some pupils and there is a possibility for discussion that can go overboard. Then it is up to the teacher to take control and making sure that the pupils focus on what they have read. By taking control I mean that there is a possibility for Islamophobic thoughts being spread in the classroom and teachers have to make sure that it does not appear in the classroom. By having an autobiography that shows us historical context, it can provide pupils with new historical data that they are unfamiliar with. One of the areas where pupils are given an opportunity to develop speaking English is by using cultural and social issues from other English-speaking countries. This is a criterion from Skolverket, "the ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used" (Skolverket 2).

By using Malcolm X's autobiography in the classroom, it fills out this criterion and gives the pupils an opportunity to develop their English. I think it is better to use a book that shows you reality which, Malcolm X's shows us rather reading a fiction book that took place in a world that does not exist. It is more effective teaching when you are able to connect two different subjects into one; English and History. In our society today, we are more multicultural than ever before, and pupils are from many different parts of the world. By having many different cultures in the classroom, it is important that the teachers provide the pupils with different types of literature that are written by people from all over the world.

7. Conclusion

Malcolm X had multiple identities in his short life and that is something that is common among people. People change their identities multiple times during their lifetime similar to the way Malcolm changes his identity. There could be many factors that could lead to a person changing its identity and in Malcolm's case the racist society played a huge factor. Malcolm grew up in a racist society that told him what he could become when he grew up and what he could not become. He changed his identity multiple times and all the changes are related to the racist society that he lived in. After joining the Nation of Islam, Malcolm changed his last name from Little to X and after that he was now a Muslim. Here Malcolm found a new identity and with his new identity, he took on more identities such as a man

that hate Christianity and white people. As I said before a person can change his identity multiple times and that is what Malcolm did after leaving the Nation of Islam and visiting Mecca. The visit to Mecca changed him and he found a new identity that he wanted black people to unite together no matter religion, so they together could fight to have equal rights as white people. He remembered what organization his father was a member of and he started an organization that had the similar beliefs to the one that his father was a member of. In the end, he found what I believe to be the true identity that he wanted to be a leader that united all black people no matter what religious beliefs a person may have had.

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