Malcolm X

- Rhetoric and Representations

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Introduction

No, I’m not an American. I’m one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy. So, I’m not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag-saluter, or a flag-weaver – no, not I. I’m speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don’t see any American dream; I see an American nightmare. (The Ballot or the Bullet April 12, 1964, Detroit, MI)

Malcolm X, also known as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, was an African-American Muslim minister and a leader for black people during the Civil Rights Movement. Today Malcolm X is viewed as a “radical” black leader that propagated violence. But this is in many ways a one-sided way of depicting Malcolm X and his beliefs. The “passive” approach of protesting by the use of “non-violence” was made popular for African-American people by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. But Malcolm X had different views and methods for how to attain freedom. Freedom is, according to Malcolm X, not conceivable by turning the other cheek, but rather by defending the dignity and nobility of the black people, and attaining equality “by any means necessary.” Malcolm X is rarely represented in a “positive” manner where he is recognised for his efforts in the Civil Rights Movement to the same extent as people salute the contribution for instance of Martin Luther King, Jr. The memory of Malcolm bares some scars in today’s modern American society where racial unity is still a very sensitive subject, and those memories should not be stirred up too much. The representation of Malcolm X is the one of a warmonger, a militant black radical and an extremist. Malcolm X was, according to many of his followers, a compassionate man that helped to unify people and helped create a society that does not discriminate to other races and minorities to the same extent. Malcolm X is still considered a very controversial leader in many ways. Debates about him and his legacy is to this day polarized and he is a complex figure that brings forth many different views and interpretations of his ideas. Most sources that speak of Malcolm X either glorify or crucify him as a person and a leader, to a certain extent. My aim is, by making this literary analysis, to unfold a clearer view. My belief prior to the writing of this essay was, that Malcolm X had
been judged to harshly by people. Malcolm’s ideology and his rhetoric have been simplified to a radical “black power” warmonger. Malcolm stood for the empowerment of black people in America at a time when they were severely socially oppressed and without a voice. 

Representations of Malcolm X are divided into two sides, where the two struggling sides have been battling for how the general population ultimately has perceived Malcolm. My claim is, that Malcolm X was both radical and peaceful. Glorifying or demonizing him simplifies his complexity; there is an ambiguity about him, which makes it difficult to place him in a category. I have found that Malcolm, ever since his youth, from being a delinquent and an convict, to a bright religious and political leader; he was always changing from his experiences. The rhetoric of Malcolm was changing with him. his rhetoric is never complete or fixed, it is “contingent knowledge” where he is unclear with his rhetoric. As he has passed away, the only way for us to get to know him, is by dealing with his texts, speeches and the representations of Malcolm X.

**Aim and Material**

A good way of gaining reliable knowledge about Malcolm X and his ideas is by going to the primary sources, that is by examining his speeches, and analysing his autobiography. 

My goal is to understand what Malcolm was trying to say. Who was he? What did he stand for? Was this a radical black extremist, or have certain people and texts depicted him in an “unjust manner”? My essay will mainly analyse Malcolm X’s autobiography, called *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. I will focus on some passages that are vital to Malcolm’s thoughts and ideas. Since the autobiography of Malcolm X is written together with another person, Alex Haley, I will take that into account, and also the glorification and the complications that are related with the genre.

The other materials that I will use to unfold my study are a few of the speeches that he made, and also articles that deal with analysing Malcolm X, his thoughts and ideas. The articles are
analyses of either Malcolm X as a political leader, his rhetoric and mainly his autobiography. The reason for including his speeches in my analysis is that I believe that it will bring a clearer picture of what he was conveying. But also, I find it interesting to analyse the speeches, in comparison with the autobiography simply because the autobiography has not been solely written by him. I will analyse whether the autobiography differs in any way from his speeches, as concerns to content, metaphors and symbolism etc.

The speeches I will examine are “The Message to the Grass Roots” and “The Ballot or the Bullet”. These particular speeches are important, as they took place during the end of his life, when Malcolm X was at odds with the Nation of Islam. They are vital to the essay as they add complexity to the stereotypical portrayals of Malcolm X as an angry black man who criticized white people and their racist ways and who demanded justice. However, the most important reason for including the speeches is to make a parallel between the messages Malcolm X gave to his audience while he was alive, and analyse whether the autobiography (written after his death) has a different message than his speeches. I believe that it is in the comparison of his autobiography and his speeches, where the wish of Malcolm X to leave a positive legacy after his passing, may be visible. In that case, there will be a clear distinction between the message of the speeches and the autobiography.

**Background**

The first half of the twentieth century in America was filled with turmoil. The Second World War and Germany’s surrender in 1945 brought an end to what is considered by many as one of the most horrific of all wars in mankind’s history. By the time the war ended, great changes were emerging. Although The Great Depression crippled America and a larger part of the world during the 1930s and the first part of the 1940s, great economic prosperity was waiting on the horizon. America, in contrast to a large portion of Europe, had its industrial force still intact and the movement towards a social and economic evolution was imminent. However,
there were few social changes that reformed the American society from the end of The Second World War into the 1960s. Racial tensions increased, as people thought that America was not up to par with the social changes that other nations around the world were making. These aspects, together with the factor of the problematic war in Vietnam, sparked a wish for a social reform in America by its people, especially among the African American minority.

One of the many ideas for social reform in America was The Civil Rights Movement. It was a reaction to the segregated American society, and the Civil Rights Movement stood for the struggle for racial equality. African-Americans and their supporters attempted to create a change from a deeply segregated and ingrained system of discrimination to a society that was not racially selective to various racial groups.

Among the emerging leaders of the Civil Rights Movement was Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. Their ideas and speeches would ignite the crowds, and they would speak of matters concerning the struggle towards freedom and equality. King (Christian) and Malcolm (Muslim) were both ministers and their beliefs, and methods to improve the conditions for minorities in America were somewhat different, although their goals were similar. The two systems that Martin Luther King and Malcolm X presented (Non-Violence vs. Violence) were in great contrast to each other.

**Malcolm X, theological and political background**

Coming from poor surroundings, Malcolm witnessed in the early stages of his life the harsh reality of hatred towards blacks in America. His family was torn apart by the Ku Klux Klan, and the death of his father by the organisation that haunted Malcolm X’s family for years. The death of his father was significant to him, as it gave Malcolm a profound understanding of being subjected to racism at first hand. Malcolm X’s disbelief in white people, his notion that all white people were “the devil”, can be connected to this traumatic event in his childhood.
Malcolm X later became a man who was raised by the streets, and the criminal activities that that type of life sometimes includes. According to his autobiography, Malcolm realised that the only way to reach freedom for African-Americans, was to respect who they were and by defending themselves and their freedom. It was in incarceration that Malcolm X came to this realization, by the aid of his new found faith in Islam. His years in prison were a time of study and intellectual progress as well as a focus on religion. His path would lead him to the organization “The Nation of Islam” which stood for “black power” and used Islam as a tool for reaching black empowerment and freedom, freedom from an American society that had obstructed the pursuit of happiness for black people in America. The leader of The Nation of Islam went under the name of Elijah Muhammad, and Malcolm would soon become a close companion to him, where Malcolm for over 10 years debated and propagated to spread the faith of Elijah Muhammad throughout America.

Malcolm was a political influence in the Civil Rights Movement. His speeches and activism in debates gave him a platform to share his convictions and beliefs with a greater audience. Although Malcolm X was a religious leader during the early years of his public career, he quickly became a political leader that emphasised and propagated the implications of living in a white society that has for centuries discriminated against African-American people, humiliated them and made slaves out of free men and women. His message was that black people in America were unaware of the mental oppression that “the white man” held over the blacks. They may no longer have been slaves on the cotton fields, but they were imprisoned by the propaganda and lies from of former white slave-owners. It was a social imprisonment of their minds, as Malcolm stated in one of his speeches:

Blacks in America had been raped by the slave master white man until there had begun to emerge a home made, handmade, brainwashed race that was no longer even of its true colour, that no longer even knew its true family names…This ‘Negro’ was taught of his native Africa that it was peopled by heathens, black savages, swinging like monkeys from trees. This ‘Negro’ accepted this along with every other teaching of the slave master that was designed to make him accept and obey and worship the white man. (Message to the grassroots, delivered on Nov 10, 1963)
Ever since Malcolm X’s contact with Islam in prison, Malcolm was committed to the teachings of The Nation of Islam, and their interpretation of the Muslim faith. His curiosity and future religious studies turned Malcolm further away from the organization and its ideals. The manner in which the Nation of Islam wanted to attain freedom was highly aggressive. One of the greater distinct differences between “conservative” Islam and the beliefs of The Nation Of Islams views, is the myth of “Yacub” that states that:

The Black person is said to be the original human, while the white person originated as the evil product of a deviant experiment undertaken by a black scientist who was embittered with Allah. Yacub created the devil in the form of a white person, who, in turn, has polluted the world with deceit and cruelty and tyranny. (Paris 186)

This myth was the greatest difference between original Islamic teachings and the teachings of the myth that The Nation of Islam was spreading, where a great racial bias was formed against white people. Malcolm slowly distanced himself from the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X realized during his trip to Mecca, that the Nation of Islam was speaking in conflict with the original messages of Islam, where the religion brought all people of all complexions closer together, instead of polarizing men and women from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

During the early 1960s Malcolm received a lot of press and attention; he was quickly becoming a leader for blacks in America, which became a problematic issue with the original leader of Nation of Islam. Elijah Muhammad feared that Malcolm was taking the focus off of him. During the assassination of John F. Kennedy in November 1963, Malcolm uttered that the death of the president was nothing but “the chickens coming home to roost”. He meant that “the white man” was responsible for the implications of his actions, and the killing of this beloved president was sign of their greed and deceit. After this remark, Malcolm was banned from speaking publicly for a period of time by Elijah Muhammad. Instead Malcolm chose to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, a spiritual journey that is a very
central aspect of the Muslim faith and one that every Muslim must take during his/ her lifetime.

It was there, in what is considered the birthplace of Islam, that Malcolm saw another side of Islam than the one The Nation of Islam propagated, and realized that Elijah Muhammad manipulated the message and the teaching of Islam to suit his own interests. He was struck by how people of all complexions were speaking and treating one and other respectfully, a great contrast to the relationship between the so-called Negroes and the whites in America at that time.

Malcolm X came back to America with a newfound faith, a faith in the whites, and a belief that change could be possible with the aid of people of other complexions than black. Before this journey, Malcolm was convinced that, not just some, but all white men were the devils (referring back to the Yacub legend) and that none of them were in any position to help the blacks in America. The “wicked ways” of the white people required a need of independence from their oppressors. Malcolm X thought that whites shouldn’t help black people their struggle during the Civil Rights Movement, because the African-Americans first needed to learn how to help themselves.

During this time (the early 1960s) Malcolm was no longer with the Nation of Islam, and he made changes to his personal political ideas. His thoughts concerning “the white man” were somewhat different. Nevertheless, he remained an icon for black empowerment, but his radical thoughts were no longer a central aspect of his message. This time was also a very difficult period for him. He was not in the organization of Nation of Islam, and he was receiving constant death-threats, presumably by the same organization, and Elijah Muhammad was vindictive towards Malcolm. It was at that period, just a few years before his death, he started writing his autobiography and when he delivered some of his most well known speeches. And it is this period in Malcolm X’s life that I will focus on.
Representation

Representations of Malcolm X are, as I stated earlier, rather polarized. Some people demonize him and some people see him as a misinterpreted fighter for peace and unity. It is important to consider representation when it concerns Malcolm X, as it is through the representations of him where we learn about who he was and what he stood for. His speeches and the autobiography gave a voice to a whole people. My essay on Malcolm X and his autobiography has led me evaluate how representations of Malcolm X as a political figure and as a person is manifested. Stuart Hall’s book *Representation – Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, illustrates how representation is created. According to Stuart Hall, representation occurs when meaning is given to the things (or people) depicted by the images or the words on the page. Stuart Hall clarifies that political figures can be representative, they ‘stand-in’ for us. Representation stands for an image, a depiction. Representation carries a notion of something that is existing, but it has by the media or a person, been “’re-represented”. The Media has described Malcolm X as an aggressive, black nationalist Muslim. The representation of Malcolm X in the autobiography strongly contrasts the depiction of him in the media, both as an individual and a political leader. Malcolm’s representation of himself in the autobiography is the storyline of a man’s transformation from a thief to a leader of social and political awareness and enlightenment. The (re-)representation of Malcolm in the autobiography is where he was a martyr for the cause of racial unity and the brotherhood of all mankind, something that vastly contrasts with the Malcolm X that called white people “wicked” and “devils”.
Stuart Hall claims that black masculinity and the representation of a black man are often connected with “hyper masculinity”. The black man has historically been described by the western world as a being that demonstrates sexuality and physical strength. Malcolm had an image of being strong and honorable, perhaps one of the reasons why he opposed the more passive “non-violent” way of reaching peace and equality. As we are left with the broad representation of Malcolm X as a rather aggressive man that carried a lot of distinct features of a ‘hyper masculine’ figure, the self representation of Malcolm X in the autobiography, which I will elaborate on further on in the text, illustrates him as a tender, thoughtful and sensitive person that was misunderstood by most. As Malcolm was a complex figure, with many sides, reading his works, his speeches and analyze how he represents himself and how others view him, we can get a rather detailed idea of Malcolm as a political leader and of his discourse.

**Autobiographies in general**

Paul de Man states that: “Autobiographies always look slightly disreputable and self-indulgent’ in the company of the major genres – the novel, poetry and drama – never quite attaining aesthetic dignity nor ever providing an empirically useful way of understanding texts.” (919) The genre of autobiographies in general has been somewhat criticized in literary studies. It is important to discuss the genre of autobiographies -for the genre has no clear guidelines, boundaries and carries low critical acclaim. Therefore, it is important to carry a discussion about what it means to write an autobiography, the problems and the opportunities of using this genre in literary studies.

Autobiographies as a genre are a rather new form of writing. Until the last few centuries, historical texts have generally mainly focused on power, politics, wars and social changes.

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1 “HM is a personality construct that occurs primarily in males, in which stereotypically ‘macho’ traits are held up as an ideal. Hyper masculine males exhibit extreme and exaggerated forms of masculinity, virility, and physicality…”

([http://www.leaonline.com](http://www.leaonline.com))
The focal point of writing history in general has been a broad view, and it has rarely been about individuals and the narration of an individual experience. Autobiographies have only started expanding in popularity the last few centuries. Phillipe Lejeune claims that autobiographies are “a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in a particular on the development of his personality” (192-222).

The autobiography as a genre might be seen as the circumstance of an individual’s experiences, serving perhaps the idle curiosity of an individual’s life. The view of autobiographies can in many ways have that effect. Many autobiographies written today do indeed serve mainly a commercial function. Autobiographies use the first person viewpoint as a method to interest, entice and make the reader understand the predicament and the situation the narrator is in. My reading of autobiographies has led me to many works that might carry significance when it comes to understanding the situation and predicament a person is in.

There is, according to Michael Benton, in his work “Literary Biography: The Cinderella of Literary Studies,” a vast contrast between the popularity of biographies in our culture, and the neglect of autobiographies as a part of literary studies. He argues that biographies are history crossed with narrative, where the content may not always be neutral (if such a thing exists) but there is, according to Benton “educational benefits of studying literary biography as a source of values, as a context for literature, and as a genre study in its own right” (3).

Autobiographies as a genre can be problematic. First of all, the story is a rather straightforward first-person point of view, generating a narrative that is in tune with the individual’s experiences and thoughts at times, unaware of other perspectives or influences. We are left in the dark as to how other people experienced the events. This is of some
concern, as the text is a one dimensional source. There is a critique to the usage of autobiography as a source, where scholars warn about the implications that writing autobiographies can mean. They are usually written in retrospect. They are not written as journals or diaries where the immediate thoughts were written down still fresh. Other aspects that are noticeable, is the glorification or dramatization that autobiographies may be used to entice its readers, where the truth is not always clear and where the viewpoint or the narrator becomes a negative aspect, as many facts lack the ability to be confirmed by others. The use of autobiographies as historical evidence is something that enables autobiographies to be used as sources of information.

Many times autobiographies describe a journey that the narrator takes, going from a period of being “lost” and unaware of their surroundings to an elevated form of consciousness. The story is almost like a “coming of age” story where the narrator undergoes impressionable experiences or struggles with the narrator’s inner turmoil and brings up matters that explain his/her development as a human being. The very nature of autobiographies is to show the life of the narrator, going back as far as the early childhood. The progress and elevation from their “unawareness” to the realization of the insight that they attain during the way is a central aspect. It is a legacy and perhaps in some cases an explanatory platform so that the author is better understood by other people or by future generations.
The Autobiography

My research about the genre of autobiographies will compare various ideas and theories from other authors that have studied it closely, and hopefully, I will add to the current studies. The Autobiography of Malcolm describes the journey, from a delinquent to a prominent politician. My essay will not to a greater extent analyse Malcolm X’s early life and the convictions and beliefs that he had during that time. My main focus will be analysis of the text and not about his “life” itself. Naturally his childhood and youth will serve as an explanatory backdrop to my analysis. I will rather concentrate my research on the last years of Malcolm’s life, the estrangement from the Nation of Islam and his newfound political and religious beliefs. I will also do a closer reading of the final chapter in the autobiography that deals with the last year of his life, named “1965”. This final chapter is significant to the focal point of the essay. It reflects on the changes in Malcolm X’s beliefs and politics. The dawning of Malcolm’s realisation that his life was coming to an end, and the individual and political changes that occurred during that short period of time, is a large reason why I will focus on this particular chapter.

Malcolm’s autobiography has been considered as an effort to show a spiritual experience and an awareness of the struggle that the non-white people of the world face. The autobiography speaks to people who are unaware of the “black experience”, and black people can identify with his turmoil. The autobiography is in many ways a testament to the culture of that time. His early years are depicted in the autobiography as a time of blindness, where he would talk and act and look like a white man, he would conk his hair (straighten) and wear flashy suits with nice shoes. Even his taste in women and everything else was nothing but an attempt to live the life of the white man. He looked towards the western white people’s world for authentication.

The autobiography shows a progress and a change within Malcolm as a person, from chapter to chapter. The chapters that deal with the years before Malcolm went to prison, his street-
hustling days as “Detroit Red” and his involvement in gambling and crime and other events are depicted as troubling times, when the narrator was “in the dark”, unaware of his ignorance. This is in accordance with what John D. Barbour says about religious autobiographies:

According to many contemporary theologians and scholars of religion, narrative is significant because it shows how religious beliefs, values, and commitments shape a person’s character. Autobiography is often assumed to illustrate the connections between narrative and character, for in autobiography the writer describes and evaluates the development of his or her character from the perspective of present religious convictions(1).

Malcolm’s sentencing to prison and his newfound faith in Islam are described as a salvation from a dark path of destruction. The experiences and the knowledge of the older and more insightful Malcolm makes an impact on the text. This is something that raises questions about the credibility of the text, as Malcolm is in retrospect speaking of the time before he found Islam, and he is describing himself and his thoughts in a negative manner. There are many examples of how the “older” Malcolm is rearranging history and the way he felt about things. One clear example is how he regards “the white man’s poison” (his women, tobacco, alcohol, and other things that according to him were considered white) and how the older Malcolm manifests his current thoughts about situations that occurred a long time ago, creating issues concerning credibility of the autobiography, in the sense that it compromises history by the narration of the “older” Malcolm. One of the typical comments that can be found in the Autobiography, how the “older” Malcolm passes judgement in retrospect on himself, is: “All praise is due to Allah that I went to Boston when I did. If I hadn’t I’d probably still be a brainwashed black Christian” (120). This type of “commentary” on his previous life is ongoing through the whole autobiography, and it negatively reflects on the integrity of the autobiography in the sense that the notion of self-representation and Malcolm’s “altering” of the past speak against the autobiography as a historical source. The autobiography is rather an individual narration of history and the thoughts, his convictions and beliefs that were changing during the final years of his life, than a historical source.
However, we must bear in mind that Malcolm perhaps was not attempting to write a “historical text” about his life, but that the autobiography might also have a religious purpose. In that sense the kind of credibility he was after might be different, as religious texts are more meant to persuade and “save” people.

When a work is written a considerable time after the event has taken place, the source can be questioned. People forget, their minds get blurry or confused. In Malcolm’s case I believe that the “young” Malcolm is sometimes sidelined. The voice of the street hustler, his thoughts and beliefs may not always be in tune with how the more experienced, the religiously and politically active Malcolm X of later years perceived his past. The older religious Malcolm stands in a great contrast to the younger atheist Malcolm. Thus it is sometimes difficult to keep the voice of “younger” and “older” Malcolm separate. Malcolm X comes across as very negative about the person he was before he found his religion. His remarks are very much coloured by his current views, which creates a contradiction in the sense that Malcolm represents himself in a certain manner, by purpose. As we are dealing with representations of Malcolm X, his own “self-representation” as young is very much coloured by his religious beliefs. Bashir El-Beshti believes that autobiographies in general are “characterized by what might be called ‘a double focus’, a split between the identity of the person whose life is being recounted and the voice of the person recounting (359). According to Bashir El-Beshti, Malcolm X uses the narrative to direct the attention to certain aspects, leading the reader as a “sheepdog” through the autobiography. This effect of “leading” the reader, can be seen as an aspect of Malcolm’s “self-representation”, which shows him directly the way in which people should read and understand the autobiography. However, El-Beshti also claims that this notion of a profound understanding of one’s life is a vital aspect of writing autobiographies. He quotes Ross Miller, who states that “the pose of the autobiographer as experienced man is particularly effective because we expect to hear from
someone who has a completed sense of his own life and is therefore in a position to tell what he has discovered” (360). Bashir El-Beshti views the autobiography as an “incomplete” work, as Malcolm’s death put an end to the project, without any real closure. According to El-Beshti, Malcolm’s death saw the end of a person and a “self” that has always been changing and was “incomplete”. He claims that Malcolm “skilfully manipulates the concept of selfhood”, that the religion of Islam has, been used as a paradigm that helped Malcolm to achieve his “full identity”, from ignorance to an enlightened state.

Perhaps the street-hustler did not see everything as “the white man’s poison”, and perhaps the younger Malcolm actually was proud imitating what is considered to be white as a way to reach respect and a social status. Malcolm had a need to be socially accepted, by both whites and blacks. Malcolm’s imitation of the way white people look and act is a central aspect in the early chapters. In one passage he writes about his relationship to a white woman, and the social effect that it had in his life:

It was when I began to be seen around town with Sophia that I really began to mature into some real status in black downtown Roxbury. Up to then I had been just another among all of the conked and zooted youngsters. But now, with the best-looking white woman who ever walked in those bars and clubs, and with her giving me money I spent, too, even the big, important black hustlers and ‘smart boys’ – the club managers, name gamblers, numbers bankers and others - were clapping me on the back (153).

Another general aspect that carries some importance for this particular autobiography is the involvement Alex Haley had in this work. Haley included a 70-page epilogue where he incorporated a great deal of information which was not approved by Malcolm, as Malcolm passed away before its release. The last paragraph of the foreword that written solely by Alex Haley tells a little bit about how, even if the autobiography was written by someone else, it carries historical importance and the author is nevertheless Malcolm X. Alex Haley emphasises this notion in the foreword, where he writes the following: “After signing the contract for this book, Malcolm X looked at me hard. ‘A writer is what I want, not an interpreter.’ “I tried to be a dispassionate chronicler” (139). Here Alex Haley clearly states
that the book contains the information and elements that only Malcolm approved of, and that his involvement was on a smaller scale.

Autobiographies that are written with the assistance by someone else, is not always a negative aspect that discredits the text. Benton Michael argues that autobiographies are significant, and that in some ways, they are a subgenre that allow access to the imagination, but stay rooted by historical facts. Many autobiographies are written by other novelists, and autobiographies can be based upon poems (Wordsworth) or even fictive characters (Joyce). This is interesting in relation to the autobiography of Malcolm X, as the autobiography is concerned with the oppression of minorities, about racism and measures of how to reach peace. According to Linda Anderson, autobiographies can in sometimes show that individual person’s experiences (such as the experience of Malcolm X) can be representative for a whole people or minority:

The idea that autobiography can become ‘the text of the oppressed’, articulating through one person’s experience, experiences which may be representative of a particular marginalized group, is an important one: autobiography becomes both a way of testifying to oppression and empowering the subject through their cultural inscriptions and recognition (104).

This is an aspect that can be connected to the autobiography of Malcolm X, as Malcolm X speaks about “the black experience” in America and the oppression that his race has endured. Malcolm X represents the black man, and the turmoil and problems such as racism and discrimination that existed in the segregated America of that time. The self-empowerment of being a leader for a whole people, Malcolm’s “representation” of a complete minority, can mean that a lot of problems may occur.

Anderson also claims that: “this politicization of the subject, though it addresses it, by no means solves the problem of ‘difference’, since the claim to speak for others is always problematic and can also elide further differences under an assumed representativity.”

The autobiography of Malcolm X is an attempt to give a voice to a minority that was without a voice at that time. Malcolm X is in many ways a representation of the
oppressed black man, and the autobiography deals with the troubles and turmoils of being black in America.

**Style and rhetoric**
The Autobiography of Malcolm X was written to be easy and accessible. In some passages it is rather formal and serious, at other times much more casual, ironic, and humoristic. What immediately becomes evident is that there is a distinct writing technique. The text has several styles, different styles that can be connected to the different phases of Malcolm’s life. The text is casually written in general, almost in the manner of a speaking monologue. It is an autobiography that reaches the reader on a personal level, as the text is virtually speaking to you, telling you a story. The style can be connected to Malcolm’s upbringing. His father was a preacher and he inherited the ability to express himself orally. Anthony Palmeri, in his article “Orality, Literacy, and Malcolm X,” explains that that the African-American urban social tradition is a speaking community with a vast oral tradition. This tradition can be connected to the time during slavery when very few blacks in America had the ability to become literate. Palmeri also states that, the African-American tradition of orality is deeply rooted in their tradition, and by their charismatic way of speaking that distinguishes them. African-Americans improvisational and quick form of speaking can be seen as a revolt, distinguishing against the rather formal and strict traditional form of speaking that presumably white people have.

What makes Malcolm X interesting is the ability to give speeches that penetrates barriers between the speaker and the crowd, by rhetoric and by the ability to speak to the audience in a charismatic way, a skill that was also shared by Martin Luther King, Jr. Malcolm’s style is, as stated earlier, connected to his childhood. The charismatic form of speaking comes from his father. Malcolm uses the “preacher” style of speaking and getting in touch with the audience. This is evident in his speeches that I will analyse further on, but this
is also clear in the autobiography. The text is mixed in its style, and the various aspects of Malcolm’s life can be extracted from it, his upbringing, his gangster days, and his political and religious beliefs.

The autobiography is written from the perspective of the “slave mentality” or “slave narrative” if you will. The “slave narrative” depicts the imprisoned life of a slave, about labour, resistance and the general life of an enslaved person. It is in many perspectives a very powerful narrative, speaking to young black people in America. According to Malcolm X, the black people of America are born and raised under an enslaved mentality, and the legislative freedom that they do possess does not matter, for the indoctrinated slave mentality is subconsciously still within them. Black people still thought of themselves as a “lower” ethnic group than white people; the reason black people conked their hair etc. was to imitate what white people considered “beautiful”. The problem that black people and other ethnic minorities faced was that the American society of that time was serving the interests of white people, that other minorities imitated white people in order to reach acceptance. This is an aspect that is mentioned and spoken about by Celeste Michelle Condit and John Louis Lucaites. According to them, Malcolm X and his thoughts gave assistance and a consciousness to black people. Malcolm X urged black people to be proud of their heritage and their race, instead of conforming and emulating something that they never would be. Malcolm X gave pride to black people and his ideas helped in many ways the progress of negotiating with White America. Celeste Michelle claims that Malcolm’s ideas and rhetoric were lacking, as his views glorified aggressive behaviour and black nationalism. However, Robert E Terrill claims in the article “Protest, Prophecy and Prudence in the Rhetoric of Malcolm X”, that Malcolm X in fact was skilful in tailoring his speeches to fit with his audience, whether he was speaking in a mosque, solely for white/ black people etc. Terrill
claims that Malcolm customized his rhetoric and his approach depended on who he was speaking to, as any skilled speaker would do.

I agree to some extent that Malcolm X’s rhetoric may be controversial and it does in fact at times have a rather hostile attitude towards white people. But, as Celeste Michelle does, to claim that his thoughts, ideas and rhetoric are “limited” is a strong simplification in many ways. Malcolm was very diverse in his speaking, he was not always necessarily radical, religious and a crusader for “black power”, especially during the final years of his life. This can be considered to be another sign that many people simplify Malcolm’s thoughts and ideas, that perhaps Malcolm X has been misinterpreted in some ways by people. Terrill makes a statement and attack the critique of Malcolm’s rhetoric by Celeste Michelle, by claiming that the rhetoric by Malcolm was always changing and never static, and that “labelling” him into a certain category would compromise the complexity of Malcolm X:

Malcolm is precipitating a form of contingent knowledge that is not ‘something fixed and final’ but instead is ‘something to be created moment by moment’ as he interacts with particular circumstances and audiences. The auditor who attempts to extract from Malcolm's rhetoric a stable ideological formation will be disappointed, for what Malcolm has to offer is instantiated in his discourse itself” (27).

The autobiography, on a stylistic level, is diverse. There are passages that are both strong in message and in form. Many sentences are simple in their ways, with many contractions, which is another sign that this biography is aimed towards “speaking” to the reader. The book is divided into 19 passages, all of them telling a small part of a story that together forms a whole. The chapter names are very interesting, as they uncover in many ways how Malcolm perceived himself during the different stages of his life. His upbringing and his horrific experience with racism as a youth is named as “Nightmare” indicating his fear and dread of “the white man”. Other chapters indicate his “hick” ways as a young man coming to the big city (Boston) unaware of his embarrassing ways. Other chapters tell the story of his dark period. “Hustler” “Trapped” “Caught”. It goes on.
But what I found very interesting was the chapter of “Icarus,” it is well known that, Icarus is a Greek myth that speak of a young man that was given wings made out of wax by his father, which enabled him to soar high over the sea. Malcolm connects this to an event when he was speaking at Harvard University, glancing out of the window. There he saw an apartment complex that used to, prior to his time in jail, be a hideout spot for him. He goes on and says:

“Standing there by the Harvard window, I silently vowed to Allah that I never would forget that any wings I wore had been put on by the religion of Islam. That fact I never have forgotten…not for one second” (395). There is a paradox in the myth of Icarus. Malcolm shows that, even if he has been awarded these wings by Islam and he as an individual has risen to become an honourable and moral man, the story is a lesson in humility, and an example of how the autobiography guides and directs the moral compass of the reader, where the autobiography in this case has a message and a focus on religious aspects rather than political.

The Autobiography speaks of Malcolm’s past, his religion and his road to enlightenment, but even though it brings up the different experiences and stages of his life, there is limited information concerning his inner life. The reader is told about the events in his life that have changed and moulded him into the individual he later became, but what was going on in his mind was in many ways left unanswered. There are some passages that give us a glimpse of his thinking pattern, such as when he speaks early on about his mother, who had a mental breakdown shortly after the death of his father: He writes: “It was so much worse than if it had been a physical sickness, for which a cause might be known, medicine given, a cure effected” (21). This can be interpreted as Malcolm’s way of showing distrust of the inner life and inner thoughts, the strange unscientific intangible inner being. His inability to

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2 “Son of Daedalus who dared to fly too near the sun on wings of feathers and wax. Daedalus had been imprisoned by King Minos of Crete within the walls of his own invention, the Labyrinth. But the great craftsman’s genius would not suffer captivity. He made two pairs of wings by adhering feathers to a wooden frame with wax. Giving one pair to his son, he cautioned him that flying too near the sun would cause the wax to melt. But Icarus became ecstatic with the ability to fly and forgot his father’s warning. The feathers came loose and Icarus plunged to his death in the sea.” (http://www.mythweb.com/ path: Icarus)
help his mother might have lead to a disbelief in things that cannot be explained in the same manner as things that exist in the physical sphere, thereby rendered him unable to control or influence it. If one is to further analyse his thinking pattern, we can easily connect the very strong disbelief Malcolm had as a young man towards a variety of aspects that are related to religion. Before he came into contact with Islam, during his first years of his incarceration, he was an atheist who dreaded everything that had to do with religion or things of that nature. The autobiography even has a chapter dedicated to this. It is called “Satan”. This is referring to his time in jail when he was given the nickname of ‘Satan’ by the other convicts because of his hatred towards the Bible, religion and God.

The Chapter “1965”

In the chapter “1965”, the reader is shown the great suspicions and paranoia that was troubling Malcolm X during the last year of his life, when he was under constant death-threats. Malcolm X writes that:

I know, too, that I could suddenly die at the hands of some white racist. Or I could die at the hands of some Negro hired by the white man. Or it could be some brainwashed Negro acting on his own idea that by eliminating me he would be helping out the white man, because I talk about the white man the way I do.

Anyway, now, each day I live as if I am already dead, and I tell you what I would like for you to do. When I am dead – I say it that way because from the things I know, I do not expect to live long enough to read this book in its finished form – I want you to just watch…he will make use of me dead, as he has made use of me alive, as a convenient symbol of ‘hatred’ – and that will help him to escape facing the truth that all I have been doing is holding up a mirror to reflect, to show, the history of unspeakable crimes that his race has committed against my race(388).

The passage above can be seen as a confirmation that the autobiography is a way to create a legacy and a testament to his life. And he urges people to remember the “wicked ways” of the white man, because he will utilize Malcolm’s death for his own profit. Malcolm thought that his legacy would be tainted, that he would be depicted as a radical, an extremist and a sign of hatred. This bears some truth, for in some aspects, history has remembered him as a “radical” Civil Rights leader, even though Malcolm X advocated non-violent measures, and force was only to be used when peaceful measures failed. Whether he was fundamental by nature, or if his legacy has been tainted by the propaganda of “the white man”, remains to be debated.
The question is, as I stated earlier in my essay, is this a fair depiction of him? He will never be recognized as a peaceful leader, as his ways of reaching peace and freedom did not always involve non-violent measures, such as the likes of Martin Luther King Jr. People have a general dislike of Malcolm X and his ideals, as he offends and criticises both whites and blacks, and turns (up until his speech “The Ballot or the Bullet” in 1964, which I will analyse further on) towards Islam as a leading light, a religion that has been an increasing threat against American values, especially in modern times.

Malcolm X was also opposed by other African-Americans of that time. The negative view of Malcolm X has a strong voice to this day, and there has been a lot of criticism directed towards Malcolm X and his beliefs. One example of this is the article “The Meaning Of Malcolm” By C. Eric Lincoln from 1965, who states the following about Malcolm X and his legacy:

Malcolm X must be taken for what he was. He was a remarkably gifted and charismatic leader whose hatreds and resentments symbolized the dreadful stamp of the black ghetto, but a man whose philosophies of racial determination and whose commitments to violence made him unacceptable as a serious participant in peaceful social change. He had ideological followers – far more than the handful of men and women who belonged to the Organization of Afro-American Unity. His spirit will rise again, phoenix-like – not so much because he is worthy to be remembered as because the perpetuation of the ghetto which spawned him will not let us forget. (The Christian Century. April 7, 1965)

Eric Lincoln criticizes Malcolm X, not only as a political leader, but also as a human being. He clearly states that Malcolm X is not worthy of remembrance. This sort of criticism is not unusual when it comes to Malcolm X, and it is an example that the polarized view of Malcolm X between people (and even African-Americans) is nevertheless present. Malcolm X was mainly criticized for his political ideology and what he stood for; this strong criticism is especially manifested by people that are in support of beliefs that are opposite of Malcolm’s own beliefs. One can assume that the strongest critics to Malcolm X and his legacy I that case will be supporters that support “non-violence” and the traditional Christian faith, in contrast to Malcolm’s “violent” ways and his belief in Islam. The article from Eric. B Lincoln was
initially published for “The Christian Century” on April 7th 1965, that fact perhaps sheds some light on the reason for this very strong negativity that is connected to Malcolm X and his legacy.

Eric B Lincoln speaks of Malcolm X as a man that was “committed” to violence. The aspect of “violence” is something that is strongly connected to the memory and the rhetoric of Malcolm X. However, it is important to remember that Malcolm X, his rhetoric, political beliefs and views, were always moulded by his experiences. And, as Robert E. Terrill claims, Malcolm was forever changing and evolving his ideas. His views concerning white people, whether they carry the myth of “Yacub” and that they are generally “wicked” in their ways or that the struggle of so-called Negroes in America is a battle that they have to wage without the help of white sympathisers, were concerns and ideas that were constantly changing.

As stated earlier, Malcolm and his pilgrimage to Mecca, where he met many friendly white people, created a change within him and his ideas. His leaving the “Nation of Islam” is a clear sign that his beliefs were changing. In the last chapter Malcolm states, that “I knew, better than most Negroes, how many white people wanted to see American racial problems solved. I knew that many whites were as frustrated as Negroes” (494). This is one of the greater changes in Malcolm’s politics and beliefs. White people were no longer seen as evil, but rather, many white people were honourable and honest in their intentions.

The chapter “1965” depicts a political change for Malcolm X, he distances himself from The Nation of Islam: “I’ve had enough of someone else’s propaganda… I’m for truth, no matter who tells it. I’m for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I’m a human being first and foremost, and as such I’m for whoever and whatever benefits humanity as a whole.” This passage illustrates the manner in which Malcolm’s understanding of the problematic racial issues has matured. Here he states that he will no longer be a subject to
someone else’s propaganda (mainly referring to Elijah Muhammad). By defending someone else’s propaganda, Malcolm has ignored his own personal opinions and beliefs. This passage is a sign of Malcolm’s wish for including white people in the struggle for racial equality. The ideological belief in the truth that Malcolm exhibits in the quote elevates him from a black leader to an international political figure. More importantly, the passage is another sign of how Malcolm further distanced himself from the political and ideological beliefs of The Nation of Islam.

A close reading of the 12 last pages reveals that Malcolm’s thinking pattern concerning white people was evolving vastly. Even though the transition of his thoughts concerning white people was a slow process, there is a clear transition from hatred to sympathy. Malcolm no longer demonizes white people, he actually sees a possibility that the conflicting races could live in symbiosis, and help each other. This progress in the view towards whites can have some to do with the evolutionary and progressive form of autobiographies, where the narrator reaches an enlightened state of mind towards the end of the book. As stated earlier, the autobiography is like a “coming of age” story where the whole book is a evolutionary journey where the last chapter represent an profound internal change within the narrator. When Malcolm leaves the Nation of Islam, and travels to Mecca, he realizes the possibility that black and white people in America can co-exist together.

Malcolm’s religious convictions and his hate towards the white man, was no longer a primary part of his ideology. It is here, in the last chapter where I believe that the great division between the views of Malcolm as a radical extremist and Malcolm as an African-American leader that aimed for social and racial equality becomes clear. It is important to remember, as I wrote earlier, that many people, such as Robert. E Terrill states in his work “Protest, Prophecy, and Prudence in the Rhetoric’s of Malcolm X”, the rhetorical and political beliefs of Malcolm X where constantly changing and that his views were never
“fixed” or final. The progress of Malcolm X in the final chapter of the autobiography shows that process, making the chapter a powerful one where a clear change is noticeable.

Malcolm X writes that during his journey in Africa, he met a white American ambassador and had a longer conversation with him. During their talk they spoke of race. The autobiography states that the man told Malcolm X that he never thought of the matter of race when he was in Africa, that the variations in language and dialect were more prominent than the colour of the people’s skin. It wasn’t until he returned back to America that he noticed that he became aware and that the factor of colour would play a part. Malcolm X states in the autobiography: “What you are telling me is that it isn’t the American white man who is a racist, but it’s the American political, economic and social atmosphere that automatically nourishes a racist psychology in the white man” (378).

This is the breaking point of Malcolm’s political thoughts. Merely a few pages state a revolutionary transition. Malcolm X no longer believes that all white men were devils.

Malcolm did not any more think that “the white man” was responsible for his racist ways, rather that it was the American system and society in general that allowed for racist behaviour to linger. This is where the two polarized viewing points about Malcolm X and his legacy become clear. While there exists a stereotypical idea of Malcolm X as a radical black extremist that speak of black empowerment and mentions the white man as “wicked and evil”, to the Malcolm X that stands for equality, understanding, political and social change. “The white man” and his racism is only the outcome of a society that is

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3 Picture: (Marion S. Trikosko for U.S. News & World Report Magazine Collection)
fundamentally racially discriminating. The people were not to be blamed, its was the society that was responsible for the racism that occurred.

In this chapter, Malcolm X also gives his own reasons as to why he is constantly referred to as a radical man. The reason for the negative representation of Malcolm X, according to him, is because: “White society hates to hear anybody, especially a black man, talk about the crime the white man has perpetrated on the black man. I have always understood that’s why I have been so frequently called “a revolutionist” (367).

Malcolm X states that “the white man” is not fond of the truth that he speaks, and therefore he is considered as revolutionary. This may be the case. Although, many of the ideas that Malcolm had, were strongly connected to Islam and to black empowerment. Malcolm did in fact usually target “the white man” as the enemy in many aspects.

The final paragraph of the chapter of the book is another sign of the elevation and making Malcolm X a sacrificial victim, the final sentences of the autobiography as the culmination of the reason why he gave his life to the struggle of the black man:

Yes, I have cherished my “demagogue” role. I know that societies often have killed the people who helped to change those societies. And if I can die having brought any light, having exposed any meaningful truth that will help to destroy the racist cancer that is malignant in the body of America – then, all of the credit is due to Allah. Only the mistakes have been mine (382).

**Message to the Grassroots**
(delivered on 10 Nov, 1963 in Detroit, MI)

The speech “Message to the Grassroots” took place before Malcolm’s trip to Mecca and the realization that the reason for the existence of the discrimination against blacks in America, was connected to a flawed society and that white people were not always necessarily racists. Instead, Malcolm attacked the unfair American social hierarchy by addressing white people as aggressors that needed to be united against, by claiming the following:

We have a common enemy. We have this in common: We have a common oppressor, a common exploiter, and a common discriminator. But once we all realize that we have this common enemy, then we unite on the basis of what we have in common. And what we have foremost in common is that enemy -- the white man. He's an enemy to all of us. I know some of you all think that some of them aren't enemies. Time will tell.
The “Message to the Grassroots” speech is one of the more memorable speeches that Malcolm gave during the last years of his life. He criticises the way black people in general dealt with the suppression by the white people. Despite the statement above, in many aspects, Malcolm does not always focus on the doings of the white man but rather on the suppressed so-called Negroes and their inability to realize their imprisonment. It is a proclamation, a call for revolution and empowerment for the black man, criticizing various non-violent ways of reaching equality, and putting an end to racism and discrimination.

He uses several ways to reach this insight, speaking about the blacks as being patients at a dentist’s office where the dentist gives him novocaine, a local anaesthetic, and starts pulling at his teeth one by one, while the Negro is sitting in the chair. By doing so, the “negro” is dying slowly, suffering peacefully, and unaware of the induced pain and the blinding of the senses that inhibit him from reacting. This can be interpreted as a metaphor, that Malcolm urges his people to wake up and take charge of their freedom and destiny, and rebel against the order of things in the racially biased society of America during that time. Malcolm later connected this metaphor and “suffering peacefully” as way for the white man to keep the so-called Negroes at bay, preventing them from rebelling against the injustice in the American society. I believe that this is connected to the non-violent, “turn the other cheek” and “love your enemy” teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr. who was a Christian Baptist minister, and who proclaimed peaceful measures for the Negro Revolution which conflicted with the thoughts of Malcolm X and vice versa. Malcolm X believed that no revolution could occur peacefully and without any violence. According to Malcolm, revolution cannot occur under those circumstances. He claimed that the so called non-violent demonstrations did not amount to anything, non-violence was not giving any result, which Malcolm X pointed out in the speech from the following passage:

So I cite these various revolutions, brothers and sisters, to show you -- you don't have a peaceful revolution. You don't have a turn-the-other-cheek revolution. There's no such thing as a nonviolent revolution. [The] only kind of
revolution that's nonviolent is the Negro revolution. The only revolution based on loving your enemy is the Negro revolution. The only revolution in which the goal is a desegregated lunch counter, a desegregated theater, a desegregated park, and a desegregated public toilet; you can sit down next to white folks on the toilet. That's no revolution.

Malcolm X did not see the “March on Washington” as a positive or a beneficial rally, even though one may think that he would give his support to such a powerful testament against racial injustice. Malcolm X emphasized the notion that black people (as I stated earlier) should not take the aid of white people that were supporting their cause, because he felt that black people needed unity. Malcolm X thought they needed to learn how to become independent first, and start to learn how to help themselves, before anyone else was able to help them. The speech takes place a year before his autobiography. It is remarkable that the difference in his beliefs concerning white people is vastly different just a year later. This contributes to the reason why Malcolm speaks about the March on Washington in a negative manner. The demonstration was a reaction to what had happened in Birmingham, Alabama and the incarceration of Martin Luther King, Jr. It originated as a black rally and ended up supported by a many white people. Malcolm illustrated his dislike by stating:

It's just like when you've got some coffee that's too black, which means it's too strong. What you do? You integrate it with cream; you make it weak. If you pour too much cream in, you won't even know you ever had coffee. It used to be hot, it becomes cool. It used to be strong, it becomes weak. It used to wake you up, now it'll put you to sleep. This is what they did with the march on Washington. They joined it. They didn't integrate it; they infiltrated it.

According to Malcolm X, the March on Washington lost a great deal of its potency, when president Kennedy calmed the masses with the hope of a Civil Rights Act, and when the ruling authorities overturned a powerful demonstration of power in the black community to what Malcolm later referred it to as, a picnic (meaning that it was no longer threatening, it was quarantined and controlled). The speech “Message to the Grassroots” is critical of the events that took place that year, where Malcolm urges his listeners to realize that there can be no revolution unless it is violent. Non-violence as a method simply cannot function as a way to reach equality, because logically no one will give up power and their
subordinate position in society easily by the naive notion that racial indifference can be eradicated simply by “turning the other cheek”:

The white man knows what a revolution is. He knows that the black revolution is world-wide in scope and in nature. The black revolution is sweeping Asia, sweeping Africa, is rearing its head in Latin America. The Cuban Revolution -- that's a revolution. They overturned the system. Revolution is in Asia. Revolution is in Africa. And the white man is screaming because he sees revolution in Latin America. How do you think he'll react to you when you learn what a real revolution is? You don't know what a revolution is. If you did, you wouldn't use that word. A revolution is bloody. Revolution is hostile. Revolution knows no compromise.

Ultimately, according to Malcolm X, revolution and the freedom of all African-Americans can only be resolved by brute force. Malcolm was by nature a very prominent and strong character. His beliefs that non-violence was the wrong approach to the issue lies in the fact that he did not see any use of a way of protesting that undermined the strength of the African-Americans and degraded them at the mercy of someone else, where a connection to the personal character of Malcolm X as strong and independent may be of influence. Malcolm maintained that the only way of being truly free from the shackles put on his people, was a problem that could only be solved by force, when the democratic measures fail.

He remarks on this problematic battle between violence vs. non-violence and connects it to his religious beliefs, where he presents us with the following: “There's nothing in our book, the Quran…that teaches us to suffer peacefully. Our religion teaches us to be intelligent. Be peaceful, be courteous, obey the law, respect everyone; but if someone puts his hand on you, send him to the cemetery”.
The Ballot or the Bullet
(Delivered 12 April, 1964 in Detroit, MI)

The speech “The Ballot or the Bullet” was delivered the following year. There was a personal shift that had taken place. Malcolm X was no longer associated with The Nation of Islam; ten days have passed since his official declaration of independence from the Nation of Islam.

Malcolm is now focusing on political change rather than on changing the religious beliefs of his listeners. This change of focus becomes quite clear, as he talks about religion and how it is a personal matter, and how the place for religion should not be in the foreground. His religious beliefs as a Muslim are no longer vital. This is a vast shift in his political career, and therefore this speech becomes a rather important change in his personal and political ideas. As Malcolm is no longer a spokesperson for an organization, he is now speaking freely as a black civil rights leader, who wants to unite the so-called Negro population in America, no matter what religion they have, as he says in his speech:

Islam is my religion, but I believe my religion is my personal business. It governs my personal life, my personal morals. And my religious philosophy is personal between me and the God in whom I believe; just as the religious philosophy of these others is between them and the God in whom they believe. And this is best this way. Were we to come out here discussing religion, we’d have too many differences from the outset and we could never get together. So today, though Islam is my religious philosophy, my political, economic, and social philosophy is Black Nationalism. You and I -- As I say, if we bring up religion we’ll have differences; we’ll have arguments; and we’ll never be able to get together. But if we keep our religion at home, keep our religion in the closet, keep our religion between ourselves and our God, but when we come out here, we have a fight that’s common to all of us against a enemy who is common to all of us.

This speech also criticises the social situation in America, as Malcolm is conveying that they suffer political oppression, economic exploitation, and social degradation. Malcolm speaks of the moral corruption that pervades America’s character and about the futility of trying to change that character. He states that he is not a citizen in America; rather that he is a victim of Americanism. Malcolm still continues to speak of Black Nationalism (as that remained his political ideology), but more importantly he criticised the American social and political structure and his disbelief in the government. In the speech he says the following about his thoughts concerning Martin Luther King, Jr. and the American political system:
Anytime you live in the twentieth century, 1964, and you walkin' around here singing “We Shall Overcome,” the government has failed us. This is part of what’s wrong with you -- you do too much singing. Today it’s time to stop singing and start swinging. You can’t sing up on freedom, but you can swing up on some freedom. Cassius Clay can sing, but singing didn’t help him to become the heavyweight champion of the world; swinging helped him become the heavyweight champion. This government has failed us; the government itself has failed us, and the white liberals who have been posing as our friends have failed us.

The more sensible and compassionate Malcolm, that we can see in the end of the autobiography, is not in tune with the manner in which he continues to propagate for a militant and aggressive liberation movement in this speech. The speech “The Ballot or the Bullet” was one of his last famous speeches before his death. But one clear contrast that is visible is Malcolm’s continuous “aggressive” criticism that was directed against American society. The part in the speech where Malcolm claims that it is time to “stop singing and start swinging” differs from his message of a peaceful resolution to the racial problems in America, and resembles in many ways Malcolm’s “usual” message to black people. This shift between what is said in the autobiography and what Malcolm said in his speeches raises many questions of representation. Malcolm remained aggressive and militant in his speeches up to his death, however the autobiography represented Malcolm more acceptable to the public, to represent him in a more sympathetic way, and to make a martyr out of him. While some people see him as a militant agitator, as other’s say that he was misunderstood by his time. This representation of him as misunderstood is clear, such as for example when Ossy Davis delivered the eulogy at Malcolm’s funeral:

There are those who will consider it their duty, as friends of the Negro people, to tell us to revile him, to flee, even from the presence of his memory, to save ourselves by writing him out of the history of our turbulent times. Many will ask what Harlem finds to honor in this stormy, controversial and bold young captain — and we will smile. Many will say turn away — away from this man, for he is not a man but a demon, a monster, a subverter and an enemy of the black man — and we will smile. They will say that he is of hate — a fanatic, a racist — who can only bring evil to the cause for which you struggle! And we will answer and say to them: Did you ever talk to Brother Malcolm? Did you ever touch him, or have him smile at you? Did you ever really listen to him? Did he ever do a mean thing? Was he ever himself associated with violence or any public disturbance? For if you did you would know him. And if you knew him you would know why we must honor him.
Conclusion
Malcolm X was an African-American leader that was one of the more prominent leaders for black empowerment and black pride. The reason people demonize him, is in my view mainly to do with the 10 years of proclaiming Black Nationalism and black power at The Nation of Islam. Malcolm’s views and ideals changed during the various stages of his life, especially during the last few years of his life. My main question, before I started to write about Malcolm X, was how he has been represented. As seen in my study, the representation of Malcolm X does indeed have two sides. Malcolm is both a demonized person and a political figure that fought for equality. The Autobiography of Malcolm X is in many ways a dedication and in some aspects a glorification of his life, where the chapter of “1965” made a martyr out of him as he foretold the unfolding of his early death and the negative way people would remember him.

The autobiography of Malcolm X is in many ways constructed in a manner that is in compliance with, what the general view of autobiographies are, where the narrator undergoes a personal journey and where outer and inner forces shape the character into what they would later become, much like I mentioned earlier in the text. In many cases they can be compared to another literary genre, coming of age stories, where there is a similar progression. The autobiography of Malcolm X uses that form, and as was stated earlier, the “older” Malcolm speaks of his young self as an unaware individual that mimicked white people, to conform to the racially segregated society that was America during his youth.

It seems as if his life and his impact on history is neglected, and I argue that his speeches, ideas and Malcolm as a political leader has been simplified to the context of a black militant extremist – a matter that is far from the truth. His view concerning white people and their racially discriminatory nature is a matter that is a sign of the change within him, where his thoughts were always moulded by his experiences. His pilgrimage to Mecca and the people he met in Africa changed his political ideas, and a transition occurred. His belief in
white people and in humanity was the outcome of his positive experiences. The ideological transformation from a religious black extremist to a man that propagates peace, unity and equality, are two polarized legacies that are currently tied to the memory and impact of Malcolm X.

Fundamentally, the representation of Malcolm X in the autobiography differs from the speeches. Malcolm X is represented as a peacekeeper and a uniting force between the races in America in the autobiography. In the speech “Message to the Grassroots” we clearly see that Malcolm is still rather “militant” and puts great blame on “the white man” for the social misfortunes that the black people in America faced. It is a speech that had a lot of the “old” and more stereotypical Malcolm in it, where he proclaims his religious beliefs, warfare and “Black-Power”. It is an important speech, as the influence of The Nation of Islam is still visible. But, in the speech “The Ballot or the Bullet” there is a distancing from religion, and where the social problems that existed were in the foreground of the agenda. Malcolm’s estrangement from the Nation of Islam, and their political ideology, is rather clear as Malcolm toned down the aspect of religion and also did not criticise the “white race” as much, but instead criticised the flawed American social system that condoned discriminative behaviour.

For a very long time, religion was the focal point that Malcolm spoke about. It is in the difference of the two speeches “Message to the Grassroots” and “Ballot or the Bullet” where we can clearly see Malcolms change in agenda. When Malcolm urged black people of all religions should unite against their oppressor, he became not only a leader for the black people that were Muslims in America; instead he became a leader for all African-Americans. The greatest difference in representation that becomes clear between the speeches and the autobiography is in fact the aggressive nature of Malcolm’s speeches. The speeches are far more radical and critical. The explanation can be the purpose of his speeches, which was to fire up, engage his audience, and to create awareness about racial discrimination.
The reason that Malcolm might not have depicted him in a “positive” manner or that people do not include his efforts in writing the history of The Civil Rights Movement, is a result of his radical thoughts during his years in the Nation of Islam. During that time, he propagated black power and his religious convictions.

We have to think of Malcolm X as a source of contingent knowledge. He is “unstable” in his rhetoric, there is an ambiguity about Malcolm’s message to the people, as his rhetoric was always changing and it was incomplete, we can’t put a label on him. Malcolm X was constantly tailoring his rhetoric to the audience, which is another example of his diversity. It is also a sign of self-awareness. As Malcolm self-represented himself in the autobiography, we cannot ignore the fact that Malcolm through the autobiography is leading us, as Bashir El-Beshti stated earlier, like “sheepdogs”. Malcolm was indeed aware of his own representation, and the autobiography was in itself tailored to entice and to create both political and religious awareness. Malcolm X rhetoric remain unfinished, and that is perhaps how we should view him – as a source of contingent knowledge. Instead of the glorifying/demonizing view that the world has of Malcolm X, perhaps we should focus on how Malcolm X can help us in the future, and how we can learn how to compromise and unify to make the world a better place.

No matter what type of legacy one chooses to remember Malcolm X as, he will remain remembered as a man that tried to make a change, whether it was by politically, fundamentally and peacefully changing society and its discriminating ways, or to create a social revolution “by any means necessary”.

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