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## Autobiography and identity: Malcolm X as author and hero

Alex Gillespie

Malcolm X's autobiography<sup>1</sup>, written in conjunction with Alex Haley, is a gripping narrative of identity transformation. It is the extraordinary story of a young Black child, Malcolm Little, adopted into a White household who then becomes the ghetto hustler, Detroit Red, who in turn converts to the Nation of Islam and becomes Minister Malcolm X, and who finally breaks with the Nation of Islam to become El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, an international human rights activist. The overall metamorphosis has a clear positive direction: each transformation seems to transcend the former. Each transformation brings with it new lessons, and the emergent Malcolm X could be likened to a butterfly escaping a cocoon.

From the point of view of studying the identity and development of Malcolm X, the *Autobiography* is as seductive as it is gripping. It seduces the reader into conflating the *Autobiography* with the actual life and identity of Malcolm X in three ways. First, autobiographies have inherent rhetorical power because they are first person accounts. For example, autobiographies have historically been used as a mode of truth telling by people who have experienced a psychotic episode, a spiritual conversion, or slavery<sup>2</sup>. In the case of the *Autobiography* this power is greatly heightened by the vivid writing style, which convinces the reader of the authenticity of the first person account.

Second, it seduces us because it conforms to popular notions of personality transformation and to a range of post-Marxian theories concerning

varieties of false consciousness and the 'liberation' of the individual from 'internalized oppression'<sup>3</sup>. When finding confirmation of our own theories in the text we tend to forget that both Haley and Malcolm X were producing the *Autobiography* within a culture where these ideas were current and popular.

Third, there is what Eakin<sup>4</sup> calls the power of the 'autobiographical dream'. This is the collusion between reader and writer in which both assume that the story being told is finished and has unity. The autobiographical genre encourages the writer to speak about their own life as if it were over, as if the autobiography itself were not part of the life described and as if the author were 'outside the realm of lapsing time'<sup>5</sup>. And being complicit in the assumptions of the genre, the readers rarely question this stance. The problem, of course, is that the life of the author is not finished and that narrating any life from a point outside of time is impossible.

Given these considerations, it is unsurprising that authors past and present<sup>6</sup> have been tempted to read Malcolm X's identity straight from the pages of the *Autobiography*. I want to suggest, however, that if one is to draw conclusions about Malcolm X's identity from the autobiography, one needs to take a more critical stance towards the text. Accordingly, the first half of the present essay will examine how the *Autobiography* has been constructed, and in particular, the way in which Malcolm X and Haley make use of narrative resources. The second half of the essay shifts from conceiving of the *Autobiography* as a reflection of the life of Malcolm X to conceiving of it as an important part of the last years of his life. The concluding suggestion is that one can see in the *Autobiography* the actual process of Malcolm X's last transformation, namely his break with the Nation of Islam.

## Metamorphosis: A narrative template

Narratives are not simply constructed out of the events to be reported. People use 'narrative templates' to aid in the creation and communication of narratives<sup>7</sup>. Narrative templates do not contain specific facts or events, rather they are abstract plot structures which shape many specific narratives – just like one baking tray gives shape to many loaves of bread. The narrative template that Malcolm X uses to construct his autobiography has variously been called a conversion narrative<sup>8</sup> and a metamorphosis narrative<sup>9</sup>. It is a classic narrative: a story of someone who has fallen, in a moral sense, and who 'sees the light.' This narrative trope is set up in the moral degradation exemplified by Malcolm X conking his hair, and its culmination is in his conversion to the Nation of Islam. Consider first, Malcolm X's description of conking his hair:

This was my first really big step toward self-degradation: when I endured all of that pain, literally burning my flesh to have it look like a white man's hair. I had joined the multitude of Negro men and women in America who are brainwashed into believing that the black people are 'inferior' (*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p.138)

Malcolm X narrates his early self, Detroit Red, as 'brainwashed' – a word that appears frequently in the *Autobiography*. The 'self-degradation' refers to the lack of self-respect that is evident in trying to make one's hair, and in a larger sense oneself, into the image of the oppressor – the White man.

The problem, however, is that if we read between the lines of the *Autobiography*, the extent to which Malcolm X was actually 'brainwashed' during this period becomes questionable. Malcolm X himself tells us that he moved to a Black ghetto in Boston, where he conks his hair, because he began to feel a 'restlessness with being around white people' (p. 117). He states: 'Where 'nigger' had slipped off my back before, wherever I heard it now, I stopped and looked at whoever said it' (p.119). In Boston he thrived on Black culture and food (e.g., p.144) and 'couldn't stand' (p.143) the middle class Black people who were trying to be White. Arguably, conking, although it 'relaxes' hair, is a distinctive Black, not White, tradition. Was Detroit Red attempting to imitate White people, or was he being socialized into a hybrid, but nonetheless distinctively Black, culture? While answering this question may be difficult, it is noteworthy that Malcolm X does not let the question arise. Or rather, such questioning does not suit the narrative template. The narrative template needs Malcolm X's 'self-degradation' in order to make more shining his subsequent salvation.

The salvation comes when Malcolm X is in prison. After conceding to an urge to get down upon his knees and pray, Malcolm X is rewarded with a 'vision' of 'of Master W. D. Fard, the Messiah' and founder of the Nation of Islam (p. 285). The narrative genre at this point is that of a spiritual conversion: Malcolm X is 'saved' (p. 263). Malcolm X writes:

I remember how, some time later, reading the Bible in the Norfolk Prison Colony library, I came upon, then I read, over and over, how Paul on the road to Damascus, upon hearing the voice of Christ, was

so smitten that he was knocked off his horse, in a daze. I do not now, and I did not then, liken myself to Paul. But I do understand his experience. (*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 257)

This utterance is complex and contradictory. Malcolm X on the one hand likens his own experience to the divine conversion of Paul, while also stating that he does not 'liken' himself to Paul. He borrows upon the story of Paul as a narrative template. Malcolm X authors himself, like Paul, as a complete unbeliever, as 'Satan' (chapter ten), who has a conversion experience, though divine intervention. The point is that the Bible provides Malcolm X with the narrative resources, or symbolic resources<sup>10</sup>, with which to author himself.

When Malcolm X began narrating his autobiography, his original intention was to tell a story of his conversion to the Nation of Islam, and specifically how Elijah Muhammad had 'saved' him. Indeed, the original dedication to the autobiography, as reported by Haley in the *Autobiography* (p. 395), was going to be: 'This book I dedicate to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, who found me here in America in the muck and mire of the filthiest civilization and society on this earth, and pulled me out, cleaned me up, and stood me on my feet, and made me the man that I am today'.

Again in this dedication one can perceive the narrative template of conversion: Malcolm X is liberated from his existence as Detroit Red and transformed into Minister Malcolm X. But the most interesting thing about this dedication is that Malcolm X chose not to use it. During the course of writing the autobiography, he broke with the Nation of Islam, and with Elijah

Muhammad. The result was that Malcolm X had a new story to tell, namely, one which did not lionize Elijah Muhammad.

Another metamorphosis, the same story

There is a second conversion experience in the *Autobiography*, narrated and enacted through a pilgrimage narrative. Shortly after splitting with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X went to Mecca to perform Hajj. He authors himself as experiencing genuine brotherhood in Mecca: he gives up the idea that White people are the devil incarnate and states that there can be brotherhood between Whites and Blacks. He reports: 'My pilgrimage broadened my scope. It blessed me with a new insight' (p. 478). That insight is most clearly expressed in his public letter from Mecca:

You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to re-arrange much of my thought-patterns previously held [...] Each hour here in the Holy Land enables me to have greater spiritual insights into what is happening in America between black and white. (*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 445)

Again we can see Malcolm X using a narrative template of conversion in the form of a pilgrimage. The 'pilgrimage', he writes, brought 'spiritual insights.' Pilgrimage, as a narrative trope, is a socially accepted mode of personal transformation<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, if one goes on pilgrimage but is not transformed in some manner, then one has failed. Lomax<sup>12</sup> suggests that Malcolm X used

the pilgrimage as a means to legitimate and narrate and ultimately give voice to views which had been suppressed while Malcolm X had been serving as a Minister in the Nation of Islam. If so, then both in the act of pilgrimage and in the narration of that act, we can see Malcolm X once again using narrative resources.

It is interesting to examine closely how Malcolm X speaks about Elijah Muhammad after his second conversion. He began to ‘think for himself’ ‘after twelve years of never thinking for as much as five minutes about myself’ (p. 416). Notice again the theme of liberation. This narrative is, perhaps, most clear in the final interview Malcolm X gave before he was assassinated. He says:

I did many things as a Black Muslim that I’m sorry for now. I was a zombie then – like all Muslims – I was hypnotized, pointed in a certain direction and told to march. Well, I guess a man’s entitled to make a fool of himself if he is ready to pay the cost. It cost me twelve years.<sup>13</sup>

This interview excerpt does not simply mark another transformation in the identity of Malcolm X. Rather, it reveals continuity of narrative form. Malcolm X is using the same narrative template that he used to narrate his transformation into Minister Malcolm X as he uses to narrate his transformation out of being a Nation of Islam Minister. Indeed, the language is even similar. Previously he had narrated his move into the Nation of Islam as one from being ‘brainwashed’ to seeing ‘the greatest light.’ Now, that greatest light is characterized as a ‘zombie’ or ‘hypnotized’ state, and the movement is toward thinking for himself and ‘greater spiritual insights.’



How can Malcolm X's movement into the Nation of Islam be a moment of divine enlightenment and also a hypnotization? If we try to read these self-understandings at face value we end up in contradictions. However, if we focus upon the narrative template that Malcolm X is using to author himself, then, the contradiction is resolved and a remarkable continuity in Malcolm X's mode of self-narration becomes evident.

#### Autobiography as a rhetorical resource

So far we have examined Malcolm X's use of a conversion or metamorphosis narrative template. The *Autobiography* is a story that is told. But who is it being told to? And why is it being told? Stories, just like any utterance, should be situated in a communicative context and analyzed not only in terms of who is speaking and what is said, but who is being spoken to and for what purpose<sup>14</sup>. What then is Malcolm X doing with his *Autobiography*?

By narrating himself as someone who has been 'brainwashed' and who has since seen 'the greatest light', Malcolm X is able to claim a certain position and authority within his community. For example, in his autobiography, as in many of his speeches, he uses his own narrative as a means to gain authority and thus convince others of his position.

I believe that it would be almost impossible to find anywhere in America a black man who has lived further down in the mud of human society than I have; or a black man who has been any more ignorant than I have been; or a black man who has suffered more anguish during his

life than I have. But it is only after the deepest darkness that the greatest light can come (*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 498)

Here the metaphor is of moving from darkness to light. At other times he uses the metaphorical movement of awakening from sleep to narrate his life. But in both cases, one can see how his theory of development, as a movement from being 'brainwashed' to one who has seen 'the greatest light,' functions as a rhetorical tool which positions him as a leader. Because his autobiography positions Malcolm X himself as having been ignorant and unaware, Malcolm X is able to talk about Black communities as 'brainwashed' without insulting them, and he is also able to position himself as one who can lead these communities into the 'light.'

The autobiographical dream, of the autobiographical author standing outside of their own life, is shattered. The *Autobiography* is not an unproblematic description of Malcolm X's life; rather it is one of the actions that comprise Malcolm X's life. The *Autobiography* does not stand apart from the life it describes. In the pages of the *Autobiography* we can see Malcolm X as he was in 1963-1965 attempting to justify his actions and position himself a suitable leader. Rather than being a transparent window on the life of Malcolm X it is better to conceive of it as a slice of the last years of Malcolm X's life. However, this does not mean that the *Autobiography* cannot help to reveal Malcolm X's identity. The following section analyses the identities at play in the *Autobiography*.

Accumulating discourses & identities

Although the narrative of the *Autobiography* is of one identity metamorphosing into another in sequence culminating with El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, the international human rights activist, close analysis of the text and other sources suggests that Malcolm X's identity within the *Autobiography* is actually an accumulation of identities. That is to say, rather than completely transcending each previous identity, each new identity is layered upon the previous identity.

Consider, for example, the early Malcolm X identity described in a chapter of the *Autobiography* titled 'Mascot', which concerns the early teenage years that Malcolm Little spent living with a White family and attending a predominantly White school. Here, Malcolm Little engaged White society on its own criteria and excelled: he was one of the best students in the class and became class president. It was at this school that he reports the interaction with Mr Ostrowski, who discourages him from becoming a lawyer because of his skin colour. Reflecting upon this event, Malcolm X states:

I have often thought that if Mr Ostrowski had encouraged me to become a lawyer, I would today probably be among some city's professional black bourgeoisie, sipping cocktails and palming myself off as a community spokesman for and leader of the suffering black masses [...] I'd probably still be a brainwashed black Christian (*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 120)

Here again we find Malcolm X using the 'brainwashed' metaphor to reject one of his previous identities, and implicitly to announce his current liberation. But has Malcolm X really transcended this rejected identity? Reading the

*Autobiography* closely we can find traces of the desires and interests of Malcolm Little in the later Malcolm X. For example, toward the end of the *Autobiography*, when reflecting upon his life as a whole, Malcolm X states:

My greatest lack has been, I believe, that I don't have the kind of academic education I wish I had been able to get – to have been a lawyer, perhaps. I do believe that I might have made a good lawyer.  
(*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 498-9, see also p. 375)

The young scholarly Malcolm Little manifests in the *Autobiography* in a more fundamental sense than this wish<sup>15</sup>. Malcolm X, although he never went to university, remained a diligent and hard working student. Malcolm X's eruditeness and familiarity with history shows that in his later life he also read, studied and learned. Thus although Malcolm X ostensibly rejected the image of the bourgeoisie, in actuality he held several of these values, and if he had not, it is unlikely that he would have been as effective in debates and interviews as he was. The bookish Malcolm Little is thus integral to the world-renowned Malcolm X, who passionately argued against integration and the 'black bourgeoisie.'

A similar case for accumulating identities can be made with regard to Detroit Red's years in the ghetto as a hustler, pimp, drug dealer and gangster. In his autobiography, Malcolm X presents this streetwise Detroit Red, with conked hair, as an exemplar of 'self-degradation.' It is Detroit Red who was 'in the mud of human society' and who is used by Malcolm X to narrate his own transformation. However, reading between Malcolm X's lines, it is clear that,

although he explicitly rejects Detroit Red he has not left Detroit Red behind. Rather Detroit Red remains an integral aspect of Malcolm X's self. In the Epilogue, Alex Haley recalls Malcolm X telling him about his former life as Detroit Red. In Malcolm X's retelling, Detroit Red clearly returns to life:

'Why, I'm telling you things I haven't thought about since then!' he would exclaim. Then it was during recalling the early Harlem days that Malcolm X really got carried away. One night, suddenly, wildly, he jumped up from his chair and, incredibly, the fearsome black demagogue was scat-singing and popping his fingers, 're-bop-de-bop-blap-blam –' and then grabbing a vertical pipe with one hand (as the girl partner) he went jubilantly lindy-hopping around, his coattail and the long legs and the big feet flying as they had in those Harlem days. And then almost as suddenly, Malcolm X caught himself and sat back down, and for the rest of the session he was decidedly grumpy. (Haley in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 391)

Recalling the escapades of Detroit Red invokes in Malcolm X the embodied jiving personality of Detroit Red. Detroit Red exists also in the discourse of Malcolm X. When the *Autobiography* describes someone as 'really heavy on his religion' (p. 189), Minister Malcolm X says 'My man!' (p.190). But perhaps most importantly, the voice of Detroit Red comes to the foreground when Malcolm X gets angry. For example, talking about the 'Uncle Tom' blacks, or 'bourgeoisie blacks,' who rejected his anti-White stance, Malcolm X says:

Why you should hear those Negroes attack me, trying to justify, or forgive the white man's crimes! Those Negroes are people who bring me nearest to breaking one of my principal rules, which is never to let myself become over-emotional and angry. Why, sometimes I've felt I ought to jump down of that stand and get *physical* with some of those *brainwashed* white man's tools, parrots, puppets. (*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, p. 391)

The principal rule, 'never to let myself become over-emotional and angry,' presumably belongs to Malcolm X's identity as a religious Minister. However, the tendency to 'jump down' and 'get *physical* with some of those *brainwashed* white man's tools, parrots, puppets,' I would argue, is an impulse belonging to Detroit Red. This is not to suggest that the later Malcolm X was, in any way, false. Rather, I would argue that the coexistence of Malcolm Little, Detroit Red and Minister Malcolm X within the same person at the same time is what characterizes, in part, the uniqueness and significance of Malcolm X. More specifically, in order to understand who Malcolm X 'really' was, I suggest that, instead of asking which identity is the 'real' Malcolm X, we should be focusing upon the tensions between these different facets of his complex personality.

#### Dialogical tensions & the 'real' Malcolm X

Although the autobiographical genre led Malcolm X to narrate a sequence of transitions, the evidence above suggests that Malcolm X, the author of the *Autobiography*, was in fact a composite of his former selves. What is

interesting is how each former identity feeds into a new dialogical position within Malcolm X's dialogical self. Each social group has its own language and interests. In his trajectory through a complex social structure, Malcolm X appropriated a diversity of languages, which through him, entered into a creative and radical dialogue. In particular there was a tension between the tough-talking and militant side of Malcolm X and another more religious side. Arguably, the former aspect came from his life as a hustler while the latter came from his life as a Minister. And although the *Autobiography* describes Malcolm X as transcending the former, one could argue that the hustler identity is essential to each of the later incarnations of Malcolm X.

One of the defining features of Malcolm X, compared to many other African-American leaders of the time, was that he talked tough and had an air of militancy. Considering his past as Detroit Red, it is no surprise that Malcolm X and not Martin Luther King (who grew up in a middle-class family) preached against non-violence. Had Malcolm X never been Detroit Red, it is likely that his stance would not have been so militant. It is this militant stance which Whites found so unsettling, which earned him media coverage, and which energized him fueling his motivation to rectify the injustice he perceived. This proactive and somewhat aggressive side to Malcolm X is evident in his early letters with Elijah Muhammad and can also be seen as partly constitutive of the later split with the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X was keen on action and tired of Elijah's patience<sup>16</sup>. After the split, and after the *Autobiography*, Malcolm X went on to set up two institutions. Arguably each addressed a different side of this tension. The Muslim Mosque Inc. had a clearly religious mission, while

the Organization of Afro-American Unity was political and focused upon radical change.

While one could argue that the Muslim Mosque Inc answered to the interests of Minister Malcolm X and the Organization of Afro-American Unity answered to Detroit Red, to do so would be an oversimplification. The Organization of Afro-American Unity answered to interests which Malcolm X had been cultivating as a Minister for the Nation of Islam and which had been denied expression by Elijah Muhammad. My point is not to make such simplifying equivalences, but instead to point out that the uniqueness of Malcolm X was not in a final unified identity but rather in the tensions between identities and discourses that he had accumulated during his trajectory.

Malcolm X recognized that his own identity development was not complete and that there were unresolved tensions. 'I am man enough to tell you,' Malcolm X<sup>17</sup> said in one of his last interviews, 'that I can't put my finger on exactly what my philosophy is now, but I am flexible.' He was not taken in by the autobiographical dream. As Eakin<sup>18</sup> points out, although the majority of the *Autobiography* conforms to the illusion of the complete and unified personality, Malcolm X himself is reported, by Haley, to have said: 'I hope the book is proceeding rapidly, for events concerning my life happen so swiftly, much of what has already been written can easily be outdated from month to month.' (p. 39). Eakin, with considerable insight, writes:

Malcolm X's final knowledge of the incompleteness of the self is what gives the last pages of the *Autobiography* together with the 'Epilogue' their remarkable power: the vision of a man whose swiftly unfolding



career has outstripped the possibilities of the traditional autobiography he had meant to write. (p. 160)

#### Autobiography: Re-constituting the self

To argue that Malcolm X's identity was larger and more complex than the available genre of autobiography would allow is to say that the *Autobiography* is in some sense inadequate or partial. But such an assessment fails to transcend the deep-seated idea that autobiographies are 'mirrors' of an individual's life which can reflect that life with more or less veracity. In this concluding section, I want to point toward a re-conceptualization of autobiography which situates the autobiography within the life of the individual, not as a reflection of that life, but as a re-constitutive moment in that life.

Selves are not essential forms carried within. Rather, they are constituted in dynamic performances which occur between people<sup>19</sup>. According to classic theorists of the self, such as William James and G. H. Mead, the self arises when the individual becomes aware of themselves from the standpoint of others. This occurs because the perspectives of others are internalized, and as such social interaction itself becomes internalized<sup>20</sup>. James<sup>21</sup> in 1890 wrote that the self is duplex, that it is both subject and object. Selves are constituted in social interaction because it is in social interaction that we become aware of ourselves from the standpoint of others, that is to say, we become an object to ourselves by taking the perspective of others upon ourselves. And this, I suggest, is exactly what occurs in the act of

autobiography. In self-narration the author must orient to their real or imagined audience, and in so doing, narrate themselves from a third person perspective. As such one could argue that the actual act of self-narration is self-constitutive. The transformative effects of self-narration can be seen in certain forms of letter writing, diaries, and autobiographies.

Consider first Foucault's<sup>22</sup> analysis of a letter from Marcus Aurelius to his master. It is a letter which details the activities of the day. Through the letter, Marcus Aurelius judges the minutiae of his life through the eyes of his master. He presents his sore throat, and what he has done about it. He describes what he ate, how he worked, how he talked, and how he helped his parents. This genre of letter, Foucault suggests, prefigures the Christian confession. Both are 'technologies of the self'. They are a means of self transformation through giving an account of oneself to a respected other.

Consider also Wiener and Rosenwald's<sup>23</sup> analysis of diary writing. They argue that, rather than reading through diaries to uncover some hidden facts, we must read the diary to see the diarist at work, to see the psychological process of diary writing, of self-examination, and of giving an account of oneself to oneself. Diary writing puts the writer in a new relation to themselves. It entails stepping out of themselves, and attempting to narrate themselves from a position outside of ongoing life. Of course, such externality is impossible, but the effort is productive, and, as Wiener and Rosenwald argue, self-constitutive.

Autobiography can be conceptualized as another technology of the self, alongside letter writing and diaries. Autobiography as a genre is characterized by what El-Beshti<sup>24</sup> calls a 'double focus'. The author is split into

the person being narrated and the narrator. Such an analysis chimes with what has been said above about the nature of the self. Paraphrasing James we might say that in autobiography the author is both author and hero. In this sense the autobiographical mode of writing encourages the author to become an object to themselves, and thus the act of creating an autobiography is self-constitutional.

In the case of Malcolm X's *Autobiography*, the social interaction is between Malcolm X, Alex Haley and the actual or imagined audience. Within interaction people are held to account, and especially in the act of self narration, one justifies past, present and future action. In the *Autobiography* we encounter, in a very real sense, Malcolm X telling us his story – telling us who he is, what he has done, and what he feels he must do. In telling this story, he orients to us, and in orienting to us, he must try to reflect upon himself from our point of view. The act of self narration thus draws the author out of themselves, encouraging them to imagine themselves from the standpoint of the imagined audience. Actions which may have seemed unproblematic before suddenly need justification, and the story told takes on quite a different frame as compared to the story lived.

That the externality provided by the act of self-narration feeds into the developing identity is evident in relation to the *Autobiography*. For example, Malcolm X reveals that after narrating his relationship with his mother, for the *Autobiography*, he was preoccupied with thoughts about her (e.g., p. 20). She was in a mental hospital at the time and, realizing (through the narration) that he was unable to justify his neglect of her, he went to visit her. When considering the *Autobiography* in the context of Malcolm X's life, it is possible

that the process of self-narration of the *Autobiography* had a significant impact on his developing personality. In the years during which Malcolm X produced his autobiography (1963-1965), he himself went through tremendous changes. He broke with the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, he left the Nation of Islam, he founded new organizations, he became an internationalist, he changed his views about White people and women, and he made overtures to more mainstream movements. Even for Malcolm X, this is a lot of change in a relatively short period of time. My speculation is that some of this change can be traced back to the autobiographical act of self-narration.

Of course it is difficult to make the argument that producing the *Autobiography* re-constituted the object (i.e., Malcolm X) that it was meant to describe. My aim in this brief chapter is not to make the argument conclusive, but merely to open upon the possibility and in so doing to present a novel perspective on how we might read the *Autobiography*. Rather than reading it as a mirror of Malcolm X's life, I am suggesting that it be read as an actual part of his life, and more than that, as a potentially transformative part. In other words, while reading the narrative we should be careful to avoid being completely seduced by it, and taking it to be an account of transformations past, rather we should remain open to the possibility that the narrative itself is a constitutive part of Malcolm X's ongoing transformation. In such a reading the description of the autobiographer begins to feedback into the actual personality of the autobiographer, thus shattering the 'autobiographical dream' and the illusion of the finished and unified personality.

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*.

<sup>3</sup> These ideas were popularised by the writings of Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Fannon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, amongst others.

<sup>4</sup> Eakin, 'Malcolm X and the limits of autobiography', p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> Eakin, 'Malcolm X and the limits of autobiography', p. 153.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Mandel, 'The didactic achievement of Malcolm X's autobiography' and more recently, Tappan, 'Domination, subordination and the dialogical self'.

<sup>7</sup> See Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, for a discussion of the concept of narrative templates.

<sup>8</sup> Eakin, 'Malcolm X and the limits of autobiography', p. 151.

<sup>9</sup> Gillespie, 'Malcolm X and his autobiography'.

<sup>10</sup> The concept of symbolic resources has been developed by Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinson and Psaltis, 'The use of symbolic resources in developmental transitions'.

<sup>11</sup> See Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, for a rich discussion of pilgrimage as a transformative process.

<sup>12</sup> Lomax, *To Kill a Black Man*.

<sup>13</sup> This quotation is presented in Lomax, *To Kill a Black Man*, p. 242.

<sup>14</sup> The idea that every story and utterance is oriented to someone is taken from Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*.

<sup>15</sup> It is not my intent to do as psycho-biographers have done, namely, to trace the roots of the latter Malcolm X into the childhood of Malcolm X (e.g., Perry, *Malcolm*, 1991; Wolfenstein, *The Victims of Democracy*, 1981). Rather my intent here is to analyse the identity that manifests within the pages of the Autobiography, and related textual sources, in order to analyse the identities being performed – and then to explicate those performed identities in terms of the narrative contained within the Autobiography itself. As such, the present analysis does not make claims about either Malcolm X's actual past or his identity beyond the textual sources drawn upon.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Lomax, *To Kill a Black Man*, p. 104-5.

<sup>17</sup> Quote from Lomax, *To Kill a Black Man*, p. 230.

<sup>18</sup> Eakin, 'Malcolm X and the limits of autobiography'.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Shotter, 'Social accountability and the social construction of "you"' and Aveling and Gillespie, 'Negotiating multiplicity'.

<sup>20</sup> This argument has been made by Gillespie, *Becoming Other*.

<sup>21</sup> James, *Principles of Psychology*.

<sup>22</sup> Foucault, 'Technologies of the self'.

<sup>23</sup> Wiener and Rosenwald, 'A moment's monument'.

<sup>24</sup> El-Beshti, 'The semiotics of salvation', p. 359.