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MALCOLM X: A MARTYR OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL ARMAGEDDON

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Abstract

This essay simply focuses on three identity crises that Malcolm X had in his life time. From a psychological point of view, these extraordinarily important identity crises aggravated his search for his true identity; on the on hand, they simply made him what and who he was through the end of his life: as a man of thought and a man of action, they made him a great figure of the Afro-American community and Islam. In other words, through these identity crises there came out a great leader of a mass movement, an ideologue and –perhaps– a man of sound reasoning that could only be stopped by bullet. Thus, as these identity crises made him what he was as Malcolm X (Malik Al-Shabazz), they also drew him gradually closer toward martyrdom.

Key Words: Malcolm X, Identity Crisis, Nation of Islam.

Аннотация

Эта статья посвящена личностному кризису Малкольма X на протяжении всей его жизни. С Психологической точки зрения, эти личностные кризисы в жизни Малколм X, усилили его стремление к поиску его истинной личности; что как к концу жизни, определило, как Малколма X. Другими словами, в результате личностного кризиса, родился великий лидер массового движения, идеолог, которого может быть, можно было остановить лишь оружием. Таким образом, этот тройной кризис личности, с одной стороны сделал его Малколмом X, а с другой приблизил к мучениям.

Ключевые слова: Малколм X, кризис личности, народ Ислама.

Özet

Bu makale Malcolm X'in hayatı boyunca yaşadığı üç kimlik krizine yoğunlaşmaktadır. Psikolojik bir bakış açısından, bu hayati önemdeki kimlik krizleri Malcolm X'in gerçek kimliğine yönelik arayışını şiddetlendirmiştir; öte yandan da onu hayatının sonuna doğru kazandığı kimlik itibarıyla Malcolm X haline getirmiştir. Diğer bir deyişle, bu kimlik buhranları vesilesiyle büyük bir kitle hareketinin lideri, bir ideolog ve –belki de – ancak silahla durdurulabilecek muhkem bir istidlal adamı doğmuştur. Dolayısıyla, bu üç kimlik krizi onu Malcolm X haline getirirken aynı zamanda şehadetine giderek daha fazla yaklaştırmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Malcolm X, Kimlik Krizi, İslam Milleti.

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Introduction: A Short Biography

Investigating Malcolm X's biography is really important. Simply, Malcolm X was a very significant figure in the twentieth century American, African-American and Islamic history and religion.

Before introducing the points where Malcolm X was exposed to his major identity crises, it is necessary to include Malcolm X's brief life story. Malcolm X was born in Omaha, Nebraska, on May 19, 1925. His father was a Baptist minister¹ who was also a passionate follower and the organizer of the movement of Marcus Garvey, an early Black leader. Because of the active participation of Malcolm X's father in this movement, his family was constantly harassed and even their house was once set afire.

In 1929 Malcolm X's family moved to Lansing, Michigan, where his father was brutally killed by –according to Malcolm X– the Black Legion,² a local anti-Negro organization in Detroit. “His mother, stricken by the death of her husband and the demands of providing for the family, was committed to a mental institution.”³ Malcolm X was then legally taken to a detention home.⁴

Malcolm X, after completing the eighth grade as an industrious and promising student, psychologically withdrew from white people and eventually dropped out of school, upon his English teacher's advice that he should think of manual work as a future career. After that, Malcolm X went to New York and began selling and using drugs and did burglary. He was now a true hustler. However, in February, 1946, when he was almost twenty-one years old,⁵ he was sentenced to ten years in prison on burglary charges.

While in prison, Malcolm X was introduced to Islam by his family members and, being converted to it, became acquainted with the Black Muslims. After being released with parole in 1952, Malcolm X personally met with the leader of the Black Muslims, Elijah Muhammad, and soon became an outspoken orator of the Black Muslims, “accepting the basic argument that evil was an inherent characteristic of the ‘white man's...world.’”⁶

For twelve years, Malcolm X was an active and leading figure of the Nation of Islam, the religious and national organization of the Black Muslims led by Elijah Muhammad. However, Malcolm X's faith toward the Nation of Islam (NoI) was weakened when Elijah Muhammad was faced with paternity charges by two former secretaries of the Nation of Islam. After this, Malcolm X abstained from talking about morality and even referring to Elijah Muhammad in his speeches as much as he used to.⁷ With his attachment toward Elijah Muhammad weakened, Malcolm X made a comment on the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, though he was told not to do so. As a result, Malcolm X got suspended by Elijah Muhammad from the NoI for three months. Malcolm X described his suspension, which had reached the level of isolation, as a “physical divorce.”⁸ His ‘psychological divorce’ took place when he became aware of a ‘death talk’ and even ‘death order’ about him inside the NoI. As a

¹ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, ed. by Alex Haley, (New York: Grove, 1965) 4.

² Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 10.

³ Kenneth Estell, *African America: Portrait of a People* (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1994) 93.

⁴ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 21.

⁵ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 152.

⁶ Estell, *African America*, 94.

⁷ Benjamin Karim, Peter Skutches & David Gallen, *Remembering Malcolm* (New York: Carrol & Graf, 1992) 146. Also see: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 298.

⁸ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 309.

result, Malcolm X officially broke away from the NoI and formed his own organizations (the Organization of Afro-American Unity and the Muslim Mosque Inc.) in 1964.

After that, Malcolm X immediately decided to make a travel to Mecca (Islamic pilgrimage), during which he adopted the name (El-Hajj) Malik al-Shabazz and giving up his former philosophy, came up with the idea that not all Whites are evil, i.e., Black and White people can get along, and there is no intrinsic reason to favor a separation between them. Somehow as a result of his new views, Malcolm X was killed on February 21, 1965, at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem, while preparing to speak.

Malcolm X led a conflict-like life, which was full of changes, with a shadow of confusion reminiscent of the fact that “to be great is to be misunderstood.”⁹ Since his three major identity crises bring about the most important changes of his life, we are going to pay special attention to them in this work. To introduce them briefly, it should be noted that his first identity crisis is when his English teacher advises him to consider manual work as a future profession. The second one is when he was introduced to Islam, as a “black religion,” in prison. And the last one is when he breaks with the NoI and, upon his return home from his Islamic pilgrimage, he announces that he changed his former view that Blacks and Whites cannot live together. As is seen, there are three important phases of his life in which he was known and associated with three different names, though one of them (Malcolm X) was and still is the most renowned one: Malcolm Little, Malcolm X, and Malik el-Shabazz.

In tracking down Malcolm X’s life journey, one should note that *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* edited by Alex Haley, is the most important work to depend on. Being a major work in the African-American literature,¹⁰ it has also a unique style of its own. Consequently, it must be noted that the book was written by Alex Haley as Malcolm told his life story to him. In other words, the content of the book was put into a context by Alex Haley himself. While Malcolm X was jumping from one subject to another, Alex Haley sometimes even tried to manipulate him to keep him on one subject and to push him to reveal more and more about his life by asking questions such as “I wonder if you’d tell me something about your mother?”¹¹ Furthermore, in his epilogue to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Haley stated that Malcolm X had checked the book’s manuscript.¹² On the other hand, Haley clearly pointed out that Malcolm X had grown full trust towards him.¹³ In short, it seems that there was a strong basis of trust between them. However, one should keep in mind that *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* actually was published after Malcolm X’s death, although a condensed version of an early draft of it appeared in a newspaper,¹⁴ which was even partly criticized by Malcolm X himself.¹⁵

Finally, related to telling and –more precisely– “editing” Malcolm X’s life story, his stand towards the very concept of integration is noteworthy of attention. Malcolm X was strongly opposed to integration.¹⁶ However, Alex Haley, especially based on a magazine report, leaned toward the idea of placing him in Civil Rights Movement and thus somewhat

⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” in *Selected Essays* by Ralph Waldo Emerson (Chicago: Peoples Book Club, undated) 39.

¹⁰ See: Alton Hornsby, *The Black Almanac* (New York: Barron’s Educational Series, 1972) 96.

¹¹ Alex Haley, “epilogue,” *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Malcolm X, ed. Alex Haley, (New York: Grove, 1965) 395.

¹² See: Haley, “epilogue,” *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 426. Also see 397, 409-10, 416, 423.

¹³ See: Haley, “epilogue,” *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 394, 403, 423.

¹⁴ See: Malcolm X, *The Final Speeches*, ed. Steve Clark, (New York: Pathfinder, 1992) 271-272.

¹⁵ See: Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, ed. George Breitman, (New York: Pathfinder, 1970) 121.

¹⁶ See: Malcolm X, *Malcolm X Speaks*, ed. George Breitman, (New York: Grove, 1965) 279-280.

associated him with integration.¹⁷ Because of this reason, perhaps, Haley added quotation marks to the word integration so as to point out its metaphorical meaning whenever Malcolm X mentioned or referred to it in a strictly negative sense.¹⁸ This kind of use of the word, one might say, would have been opposed by Malcolm X, especially considering the fact that “Mecca broadened Malcolm but did not make him an integrationist.”¹⁹ Malcolm X’s stand in terms of integration was very unique, as can be seen in the following statement of his: “We are not fighting for integration, nor are we fighting for separation. We are fighting for recognition as human beings.”²⁰

The life he led was so conflict-like that it is not an easy task to understand him correctly. To give an example, once a close associate of Malcolm X’s, Muhammad Ali, spoke critically of him when he broke with the NoI.²¹ Only years later, Muhammad Ali, living with this “only regret” about his past, enthusiastically admitted that Malcolm X was “a great, great man.”²²

Three Identity Crises of Malcolm X

The first major identity crisis of Malcolm X centers on the role of teacher in one’s life. Malcolm X began to experience his first major identity crisis when his English teacher advised him to think about carpentry as a future career instead of becoming lawyer, which he passionately wanted to be. Malcolm X, while in the seventh grade, got so negatively affected by this advice coming from his teacher. He described this as “the first major turning point” of his life.²³ Moreover, Malcolm X also became aware that the same teacher did not give the same advice to anyone else in his classroom: “They [other students] all reported that Mr. Ostrowski had encouraged whatever they had wanted. Yet nearly none of them had earned marks equal to mine.”²⁴ With this incident, he actually began to think about the notion that he was ‘different’ from other students and experienced “the sense of being a real part of [his] own kind for the first time.”²⁵ “It was then that I began to change –inside.”²⁶ From this point on, Malcolm begins to act strangely and to feel uncomfortable when he was around white people until the point where he dropped out of school.

The advice of his English teacher, Mr. Ostrowski, had such a negative impact on Malcolm X. At this point, one might raise such questions as ‘was not Malcolm X capable of not paying attention to this incident as a student who once “starched up a thumbtack and deposited it in one of his teacher’ chair who unjustly humiliated him?’, ‘was he not capable of going on into learning and pursuing his future plan of becoming a lawyer, though he was only an adolescent boy?’ The answer to these questions appears to be ‘No’, mainly because his English teacher was the one to whom Malcolm X really looked up. Along with the fact that English was one of his favorite subjects, there also appears that Malcolm X had a certain feeling of admiration and authority towards his English teacher specifically because of his caring inclination to give advice to his students. Malcolm X clearly states: “English and history were the subjects I liked most. My English teacher, I recall –a Mr. Ostrowski– was

¹⁷ Haley, “epilogue,” *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 427, 441.

¹⁸ For some examples, see: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 27, 32, 39, 55, 58, 115, 184, 247-9, 257, 259, 274-6, 279, 282-4, 361.

¹⁹ Peter Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 388.

²⁰ Malcolm X, *Malcolm X Speaks*, 51.

²¹ See: Haley, “epilogue,” *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 412-413.

²² See: David Remnick, *King of the World* (New York: Random, 1998) 303.

²³ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 36.

²⁴ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 37.

²⁵ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 36.

²⁶ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 37.

always giving advice about how to become something in life.”²⁷ On the other hand, for Malcolm X, ignoring the unjust advice of his English teacher as an able and caring authority figure, was not in the realm of possible choices. It was not even in the realm of knowledge. In fact, Malcolm X was so obsessed with this shocking advice that he did even avoid talking about that when he was questioned by his host family and people who knew him.²⁸ In other words, Malcolm X had shut off his mind about searching for other possible choices or talking the problem out. Just like he did in the case of his mother being hospitalized: “My mind had closed about our mother. I simply didn’t feel the problem could be solved, so I had shut it out.”²⁹ Also, considering the fact that teachers are the first formal authority figures, in general, in children’s lives, it becomes easy to come to the conclusion that Malcolm X’s stagnant state of mind at the time was somewhat inevitable. Consequently, when Malcolm X became aware of the unjust discrepancy of the advice for future careers compared to the ones given to his classmates he got confused and became really disturbed with the question why he was being treated differently. His English teacher, as a formal authority figure to whom Malcolm X really looked up, by offering him two choices: manual work as consistent with others’ expectation of him or dropping out of school and becoming a hustler as a way of free life.³⁰ Since Malcolm X found the former one more humiliating, he chose the latter one: he dropped out of school and ultimately became a hustler.

Malcolm X, by dropping out of school and choosing the streets, did not resolve confusion, with which he was overwhelmingly faced in school. Yet he tried to resolve, or at least escape, his identity confusion by choosing the streets where he could act more freely no matter what the others’ expectations of him were. More specifically, it has been stated that “since there is no self without its hope, there is no self which is not free. Freedom...is the essence of selfhood.”³¹ In other words, it is not possible to talk about an individual when there is no free will. Thus, as an individual who psychologically cannot pursue the future plan of his own free will, Malcolm X could not stay in school. On the other hand, up to eighth grade, the notion of free will in Malcolm X was not exposed to a serious damage. Yet the teacher caused the damage and, as a result, Malcolm X chose free will, i.e. the streets where he thought he could function out of his own free will. Consequently, considering the fact that “The word ‘identity’ comes from the roots ‘id’ and ‘entity,’ which show its meaning: ‘the same being,’”³² Malcolm X’s endeavor was merely to become himself.

However, one mindset was already established in Malcolm X’s mind: being white or becoming like white leads a person to get more ‘freedom’ (free will) than he/she already has. Trying to become like white or, for instance, in Malcolm X’s terms, trying “to look ‘pretty’ by white standards,”³³ might be translated into trying to have respect among black people and, more specifically, to “show” a notable proof of a white ancestor.³⁴ But a black person’s endeavor, especially that of Malcolm X in our account, has the psychological basis in which one wants to have the same free will as a white person has. In the case of Malcolm X, the object used as a means to get respect, recognition, free will, etc. is his hair. He tried to have his hair look like a white man’s hair, which was a kind of self demean: “This was my first big

²⁷ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 29.

²⁸ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 36, 38.

²⁹ Haley, “epilogue,” *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 398.

³⁰ See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 100.

³¹ William Ernest Hocking, *The Self: Its Body and Freedom*, cited in *Philosophy: A Literary and Conceptual Approach*, ed. Burton F. Porter, (New York: Harcourt, 1974) 299.

³² David Bohm, *On Creativity*, ed. by Lee Nichol, (New York: Routledge, 1998) 99.

³³ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 55.

³⁴ See: Hakim A. Jamal, *From the Dead Level: Malcolm X and Me* (Kent: Andre Deutsch, 1971) 181. Also see: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 107.

step toward self-degradation: when I endured all of that pain, literally turning my flesh with lye, in order to cook my natural hair until it was limp, to have it look like a white man's hair."³⁵ In addition, his first intimate relationship with a white woman whom he calls Sophia³⁶ in stead of her real name, though there was no love involved,³⁷ can also be attributed to the same mindset: being in a relationship with a white woman is to become like a white man. Indeed, Malcolm X does not avoid talking about his "gain" out of this relationship: "even among Harlem Negroes, her [Sophia's white] looks gave me status."³⁸

Malcolm X as a hustler, still tried to make use of what he learned in the process of being exposed to identity confusion, which is a marking peculiarity of his challenging personality. He would never accept to lose and the notion that he was inferior. He was very well aware that there were some widespread, unjust perceptions against his own kind and he was just being a victim of them. Likewise, if he were to psychologically accept that there was something wrong with him, he would most probably have stayed in school in the first place. But then he would have to sacrifice his challenging, competitive personality at best. Regarding the fact that he was aware of his being victim of the wrongfully established common perceptions, it might be mentioned that notably two times did he make "use" of them. First, during World War II, to avoid the draft, he tries to make himself look like a mentally ill person and succeeds on it: "That psychiatrist's blue pencil dropped, and his professional manner fell off in all directions....I knew I had him."³⁹ Second, after robbing a house in a wealthy neighborhood, the police spot him and his accomplices. But, instead of escaping from the police, Malcolm X gets out of the car, walks toward the police and asks them directions "like a confused Negro." Thus, the police never think that he might be a house robber. Related to this incident, in fact, Malcolm X cunningly made the following remark: "I knew that the white man is rare who will ever consider that a Negro can outsmart him."⁴⁰

At this point, it might be contented that in the center of the struggle of Malcolm X, as a target, was the psychologically common conception that black people were inferior. He knew that they were not, since he was a perfect example of being intelligent enough to pursue a profession as white people do but not being psychologically allowed. In addition to the examples mentioned above, it might be said that Malcolm X was so sensitive about this inferiority-implying perception that he, later, for example, reprimands a New York Post editor on being 'rude' to begin to speak without being called on in a question-answer session: "Sir,... Why didn't you put up your hand and wait until I called on you? No, why didn't you find out?... You're being rude. You're proving my point."⁴¹ The point to notice here is that, though this "rudeness" may happen to anybody, Malcolm X sees it as a reflection of the inferiority implying perception to the extent that it leads him not to answer the editor's question at all and call on someone else.

Malcolm X, until faced with his most severe identity crisis in adolescent years, had a relatively sufficient enough personality to make sense of life. Confused with the fact that he was treated differently because he was different, he chose the streets, i.e., to become a hustler, as the only possible way to secure his self-control. However, since every individual tries to

³⁵ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 55.

³⁶ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 68.

³⁷ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 122.

³⁸ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 94.

³⁹ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 108.

⁴⁰ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 146. For another similar example, see: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 110.

⁴¹ Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, 20.

“construct an understanding of the social/cultural system within which he/she exists,”⁴² Malcolm X’s perception was that the social/cultural system within which he existed was unjust to him. He knew that he did not deserve to be considered as somewhat inferior but he was naturally unable to make a real sense of the question why?

Malcolm X, ultimately ends up in jail being sentenced to ten years. On the one hand, his ending up in jail only intensifies his identity confusion simply because it led him to look back and relive his past experience when he was first exposed to the sense of being of a different kind. Thus, naturally, he perceived the fact that he ended up in jail as a consequence of his first identity crisis. In other words, his escape from identity confusion toward a possible way of identity formation, i.e., a noble way to become himself anyway, did not work out. Besides, his being sentenced to ten years was clearly perceived by him as due to the fact that he had kept some white girls in his burglary crew: “Before the judge entered, I said to one lawyer ‘we seem to be getting sentenced because of those girls!’”⁴³ As a result, since he ended up in jail, it was apparent to him that his endeavor to gain and, more precisely, to protect his self-control and thus his self-esteem was proven futile. He was no longer somebody. Thus, it might be stated that Malcolm X’s blasphemy, which intensified when he got in jail, emerged and increased as a result of his feeling of nothingness just as it is an indication of it as well.

On the other hand, it can be easily contented that Malcolm X’s jail experience provided him with an opportunity for moratorium. In such a period of time, mostly in isolation, the young man confronts an amply sufficient chance to scrutinize his previous commitment, i.e., to think over his previous experiences and come up with a more plausible view of himself at the end. Thus, it should be noted that moratorium, in general, provides an overall picture of the individual’s past experiences and a framework to properly understand them, but it also prepares the way for another crisis when the individual realizes that his/her commitment is not he/she is meant to be. In our case, Malcolm X’s commitment is not he/she is meant to be. In our case, Malcolm X’s commitment was directed to gang-life as a way of living without sacrificing self-control, self-esteem, etc. In his prison years, on the other hand, Malcolm X was to realize that his ‘commitment’ to gang life was not what he is; however, he was also to confront major crisis: embracing a new, “black” religion and being committed to it more than anything else as a life giving essence of identity formation.

Before we pass on to his second major crisis, a very illuminating example of how moratorium functioned in Malcolm X’s life is worth mentioning here. Regarding his quitting smoking, Malcolm X refers to solitary as a tool of conditioning: “Quitting cigarettes wasn’t going to be too difficult. I had been conditioned by days in solitary without cigarettes.”⁴⁴ Consequently, it might be stated that the whole experience of him being in prison functioned as a conditioning to renew himself and make him prone to a new commitment. More specifically, the prison experience was sufficient enough to turn a ‘hustler’ into a religious man (minister).

As can be seen, Malcolm X confronted his second major crisis when he was introduced to Islam as a “black religion” by his own family members. In the process of his becoming a Muslim and thus a member of the Nation of Islam, the most important role is played by his younger brother, Reginald, who had witnessed Malcolm X as a hustler.⁴⁵ More

⁴² John M. Rybash & Paul A. Roodin, “Making Decisions About Health-Care Problems: A Companion of Formal and Postformal Modes of Competence,” in *Adult Development: Comparisons and Applications of Developmental Models*, Vol. 1 (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1989) 225.

⁴³ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 151. Also see: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 216.

⁴⁴ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 157.

⁴⁵ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 105. Also see: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 128.

specifically, all of Malcolm X's brothers and sisters except for Ella⁴⁶ were already converted to Islam and they were constantly thinking about introducing him to Islam. At first, Malcolm X gets a letter aimed at introducing him to Islam as "natural religion for black man,"⁴⁷ from his brother Philbert, whom he describes as someone "forever joining something."⁴⁸ Malcolm X responds to this letter with a most vicious reply. Then his brothers and sisters "had decided that Reginald, the latest convert, the one to whom I [Malcolm X] felt closest, would best know how to approach me, since he knew me so well in the street life."⁴⁹ They were really right in this decision because Reginald introduced Malcolm X to Islam such that it was an ultimate, mysterious remedy to literally get Malcolm X out of prison. Malcolm X very well remembers the psychological impact of Reginald's letter on him: "My automatic response was to think he had come upon some way I would work a hype on the penal authorities... 'Get out of prison.' The words hung in the air around me, I wanted out so badly."⁵⁰

Reginald's introduction of Islam is especially important in terms of its two aspects. The first one is that he introduced Islam in a way that it was strongly associated with free will, self-control or, to be precise, freedom in Malcolm X's mind. Secondly, not only did his letter bring about this kind of association in Malcolm X's mind, it also led him to immediately respond to his advice (not to eat pork and not to smoke cigarettes) and take action, which supported this association making way for his full acceptance of Islam along with the membership of the NoI. In other words, the crucial importance of his taking action not to eat pork is that it created an atmosphere among his inmates, from which he psychologically benefited and enjoyed: "It was being mentioned all over the cell block by night that Satan [Malcolm X] didn't eat pork. It made me very proud, in some odd way."⁵¹ This incident is strictly emphasized by Malcolm X himself that he, though he describes it as his "first pre-Islamic" submission since it was extrinsically motivated, admits the importance of it by using an interesting formulation. Regarding this incident, "I had experienced," says Malcolm X, "for the first time, the Muslim teaching, 'if you will take one step toward Allah -Allah will take two steps toward you.'"⁵² Consequently, it might be stated that this incident in particular marks the beginning of his new identity as a Muslim.

After that, Reginald personally visits Malcolm X and talks to him about Islam and Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the NoI at the time. It is important to note that Reginald's introduction of Islam is mixed with the notion of total opposition against white people. Reginald clearly tells Malcolm X that "The white man is the devil."⁵³ Moreover, he introduces Islam as a "black religion" and thus it would not be a far-away assumption that Islam, as introduced by Reginald, is perceived by Malcolm X literally as a black religion. In his second visit, Reginald associates this new, 'black religion' with the very sense of identity of Malcolm X: "You don't even know who you are."⁵⁴ Moreover, the lack of the sense of identity, according to Reginald, was because of "the devil white man' who 'cut these black people off from all knowledge of their own kind,... until the black man in America was the earth's only race of people who had absolutely no knowledge of his identity."⁵⁵ In brief,

⁴⁶ See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 157. Also see: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 235-236.

⁴⁷ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 156.

⁴⁸ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 156.

⁴⁹ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 157-8.

⁵⁰ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 156.

⁵¹ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 157.

⁵² Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 157.

⁵³ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 160.

⁵⁴ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 162.

⁵⁵ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 163.

knowing that there was nothing wrong with him, Malcolm X was already open to this kind of teaching.

After a while, Malcolm X is visited by his sister Hilda. She talks to him about the basic teachings of Elijah Muhammad, which were about the notion of black superiority. According to these teachings, shortly called “Yacup’s History,” and that “the fist humans, Original Man, were a black people.”⁵⁶ Among these people was a dissatisfied scientist called Mr. Yacup with a “big head.” Though he was black too, he got expelled from his community (Mecca) because he promoted the idea of breeding races scientifically. Thus, in an ambitious effort to take revenge, he first breeds brown-colored people and from them ultimately emerge white people, who are finally expelled to Europe because of the turmoil and anarchy they caused.⁵⁷ Consequently, exposed to these teachings, Malcolm X became more confused than he was. He was actually expecting a mysterious remedy to get out of prison regaining his self-control, freedom, and thus human dignity. Instead, he was faced with a heavy propaganda of a new religion preaching that white man is devil who is unjustly oppressing the black man.

However, already familiar with the joy and dignity that one can get out of being a religious person, Malcolm X sees that everything begins to make sense and, corresponding with Elijah Muhammad himself, finally decides to become a Muslim. Actually, he was psychologically prepared and stimulated to entering Islam as preached by Elijah Muhammad and his own family members. He could not remain unresponsive to these teachings, as he himself states: “I’ve never been one for inaction. Everything I’ve ever felt strongly about, I’ve done something about.”⁵⁸

On the one hand, the introduction of this new religion was mixed up with the notion of black superiority and intense opposition against ‘oppressing’ white people, who Malcolm X began to see as the exact reason why he dropped out of school and, for the sake of self-control, free will, ext., chose what seemed to be a dignified way of life for him through living as a hustler, which did not work out causing him to end up in prison and indispensably give up more freedom. On the other hand, the new religion, through Reginald’s style and inclination of indirect way of communication,⁵⁹ was associated with freedom in Malcolm X’s mind. Therefore, he was open to what he was going to be told as a new religion and its “basic teachings.” Besides, Malcolm X confronted these teachings such that they, metaphorically speaking, were either going to be the real remedy to get him out of prison making him embrace freedom again or they were going to provide and lead him to some kind of opportunity to experience freedom however possible in prison conditions. In Malcolm X’s life, the latter took place changing a hustler into a challenging reader.

In fact, Malcolm X’s search for self-control, self-esteem, and thus freedom, ext. can be tracked down by means of some of his statements. For example, Malcolm X eagerly states how he felt when he was talking about the time he really became a ‘money-making’ hustler: “I felt, for the first time in my life, that great feeling of *free!*”⁶⁰ Interestingly, he makes the same association regarding his prison studies when he, driven by the basic teachings of the new “black religion,” becomes a ‘heavy’ reader: “In fact up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life.”⁶¹ In brief, Malcolm X, shying away from school as a result of his teacher’s advice which he could not be comfortable with, first leaned toward gang life in an attempt to protect his self-control, and thus freedom. When he ended up in prison, his choice to protect

⁵⁶ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 165.

⁵⁷ See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 165-167.

⁵⁸ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 171.

⁵⁹ See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 159.

⁶⁰ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 100.

⁶¹ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 174.

his self-control was proven futile and thus his whole freedom was in serious jeopardy being restricted to prison for ten years. However, right at this point, with the introduction of Islam, as preached by Elijah Muhammad, the core of which was opposition against white people, everything began to make sense for Malcolm X; The responsible for his current state was the white man. Moreover, the teachings of this religion, as preached by E. Muhammad, provided a black-centered demonology,⁶² which only functioned as to make Malcolm X psychologically sound, as it is interesting that he really believed them. Consequently, he became a devotee to this new religion and, exploring the *freedom* of reading, got in a path of becoming “the ablest and most eloquent spokesman”⁶³ of Black Muslims.

His prison studies deserve attention here since they are an important part in the making of Malcolm X. At first, he realizes his poor vocabulary and insufficient dexterity to write as a ninth grade drop-out and begins to study dictionary, writing every words and reviewing the meanings. Since the books donated to the prison library were mostly about history and religion,⁶⁴ Malcolm X especially becomes familiar with the history of black people. Especially noteworthy is that his reading Gregor Mendel’s book *Findings in Genetics* strengthens his belief in the teachings of Elijah Muhammad.⁶⁵ He gets so immersed into “serious reading” that even after the lights are turned off he tries to continue to read in glow adjusting his eyes to it and faking that he is asleep when the prison guards approach: “three or four hours of sleep a night was enough for me.”⁶⁶

It is worth mentioning that, as one major reinforce of Malcolm X’s intellectual struggle, he knew how a man of knowledge becomes very well respected, by observing one of his old inmates named Bimbi: “Bimbi was known as the library’s best customer. What fascinated me with him most of all was that he was the first man I had ever seen command total respect...with his words.”⁶⁷ Also, after a while, he joins prison debates and for the first time in his life personally experiences speaking before an audience, which was as appealing to him as his reading activity was: “in the prison, debating, speaking to a crowd, was an exhilarating to me as the discovery of knowledge through reading had been.”⁶⁸ Another major reinforcement in the making of Malcolm X as a passionate spokesman of the NoI was his realization that a book is checked out after he mentions its name in a prison debate: “that book, right after the debate, disappeared from the prison library. It was right there in prison that I made up my mind to devote the rest of my life to telling the white man about himself – or die.” In other words, his prison debates, obviously, helped him closely experience the power of rhetoric so that he even consciously decided to channel his energy into passionate speech as a great tool of struggle.

So far, we have been trying to deal with the second major identity crisis, which Malcolm X primarily experienced in prison. But it should be noted that just as his first major identity crisis was a process, beginning from the point when he dropped out of school until he embraced Islam (1948) in prison, his second identity crisis was a process too. It might be said that the process of his second identity crisis ended either, in general, when he broke with Elijah Muhammad and the NoI, or when he actively joined the NoI after getting out of prison (1952), in particular. Moreover, Malcolm X confronted the real challenge of his second identity crisis when his brother, Reginald, “the one who introduced [him] to the Nation of

⁶² See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 165.

⁶³ John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974) 425.

⁶⁴ See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 174.

⁶⁵ See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 176.

⁶⁶ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 175.

⁶⁷ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 155.

⁶⁸ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 185.

Islam,”⁶⁹ got suspended from it by Elijah Muhammad. When Reginald, being suspended as a result of his “improper relations with the then secretary of the New York Temple”⁷⁰ of the NoI, begins to talk critically about Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X upon this incident, got really confused: on the side was now the organization of his devotion, the Nation of Islam, on the other side was his blood brother, Reginald, who introduced him to it himself.

Malcolm X, struck with confusion, personally writes a letter to Elijah Muhammad in favor of Reginald, since he was extremely concerned about both his brother and his devotion. The following excerpt actually very well illustrates the confused situation of Malcolm X: “I put the letter into the box for the prison censor. Then all the rest of that night, I prayed to Allah.”⁷¹ Elijah Muhammad writes back to Malcolm X saying that because of the fact that Reginald did not follow the rules of the NoI, he could not be considered a true believer in the first place. Consequently, Malcolm X finds this answer satisfactory, attributing the suspension incident to the fact that his brother was not actually devoted himself to the NoI as he himself did. Malcolm was now convinced that “[he] was a Muslim before [he] was Reginald’s brother.”⁷² Moreover, the fact that Reginald, being rejected by his own family for Elijah Muhammad,⁷³ later becomes mentally ill, only strengthens Malcolm X’s belief in the strange demonology as espoused by the NoI. No wonder then he later became a fearless spokesman and, as a true believer of black superiority, urged black people to even ‘thinking black.’⁷⁴ One might think that if Malcolm X did not believe in this demonology, he could not have brought about “a kind of psychic satisfaction” to black people.⁷⁵

The Nation of Islam functions as a mass movement in Malcolm X’s life. Just as a mass movement provides its members with “a personal rebirth –an escape to a new identity,”⁷⁶ the NoI provided Malcolm X with a new identity, first as religious member of it and, not much later, as a minister. In other words, no matter how much its teachings were strange, the NoI put Malcolm X’s general perception of white–black in a framework that made ‘great’ sense to him mainly because of the unjust treatment to which he was exposed. Thus, Malcolm X, after getting out of prison, actively joins the NoI and gets his X⁷⁷ as a mark of his lost-found identity: lost in the wilderness of North America and found in the Lost-Found Nation of Islam.⁷⁸

Malcolm X, now as an active and leading figure of the NoI, becomes widely renowned in late 1959.⁷⁹ Actually, Malcolm X’s potential was already realized by Elijah Muhammad, soon after he got out of prison. He worked really hard and deserved the publicity. However, it should be mentioned that the core of his struggle, in this period of time until his break with the NoI, was the fact that he preached black supremacy and the idea of total opposition against white people. For example, as a result, other than the fact that he was pictured by media as preaching hate, he was faced with such questions as “Mr. Malcolm X, why do you

⁶⁹ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 187.

⁷⁰ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 187.

⁷¹ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 188.

⁷² Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 300.

⁷³ See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 190.

⁷⁴ C. Eric Lincoln, *Sounds of the Struggle* (New York :William Morrow & Company, Inc. 1967) 85.

⁷⁵ See: John White, *Black Leadership in America* (New York: Longman, 1990) 167. (It should also be noted here that John White attributes this point to Bayard Rustin).

⁷⁶ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961) 100.

⁷⁷ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 201.

⁷⁸ The official name of the Nation of Islam is The Lost-Found Nation of Islam. See: Malcolm X, *The Final Speeches*, 248. Also see: E. U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962) 130.

⁷⁹ See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 240-3.

teach black supremacy, and hate?”⁸⁰ For this reason, one might contend that his ill, perhaps subconscious, perception of inferiority as Malcolm Little was now turned into that of superiority with his new identity as Malcolm X. For example, he was to openly talk about Armageddon as he himself believed in it. In Elijah Muhammad’s teaching, Armageddon was described as “a final clash between the forces of good (i.e., Blacks) and the forces of evil (i.e., Whites).”⁸¹ It has even been stated that Malcolm X, with his speeches, “frightened whites.”⁸² In short, in the terms of his cousin’s husband, Hakim Jamal, who knew him from street life, “Malcolm X was not Malcolm Little”⁸³ at all.

Also, one might think that Malcolm X reflected his subconscious feeling of supremacy even in his marriage. He makes the following statement about his wife: “In those days she was one of the few whom we had attracted who had attended college.”⁸⁴ More specifically, the fact that his wife had a college degree might be interpreted as one source of his attraction to her. On the other hand, it is interesting that Malcolm X names his first daughter after a savage king: “Attilah, our oldest daughter, was born in November 1958. She’s named for Attilah the Hun (he sacked Rome).”⁸⁵ Moreover, the fact that he named his other daughters, except for the fourth one, Gamilah, with male names such as Qubilah and Ilyasah⁸⁶ may be considered as a reflection of his ill perception of supremacy in the form of male names. If so, it appears that Malcolm X’s favoring male children more than female ones to the extent that he gave his daughter mostly male names would be a clear indication of how ill his perception was. Interestingly, only later, after his break with the NoI, would he realize and admit that, for example, he never bought a gift for his daughters. In his epilogue to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Alex Haley notes; “You know,” he said after a while, “this isn’t something I’m proud to say, but I don’t think I’ve ever bought one gift for my children... That’s not good, I know it...”⁸⁷

However, during this period, in which he was a minister of the NoI, he made his most provocative speeches to the extent that he “almost single-handedly transformed the way black people thought about themselves.”⁸⁸ More specifically, without his commitment to the NoI and his sound belief in its strange demonology, he could not have become Malcolm X.⁸⁹ In other words, he was, however distorted in his perception, a product of his identity crises. Yet, as his major identity crises present a continuum, there was another identity crisis to come, for which he uses the concept of crisis for the first time to define in his *Autobiography*: “In the years to come, I was going to have to face a psychological and spiritual crisis.”⁹⁰

Just like his former identity crises, the third major identity crisis he was faced with was rather a process leading him to publicly announce his break with the NoI on March 8, 1964, a few weeks ago prior to his travel to Mecca.⁹¹ Malcolm X was already aware of the

⁸⁰ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 242.

⁸¹ C. Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984) 164.

⁸² Mary Frances Berry, *Black Resistance and White Law* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971) 210

⁸³ Jamal, *From the Dead Level: Malcolm X and Me*, 142.

⁸⁴ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 231.

⁸⁵ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 234.

⁸⁶ See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 235, 418.

⁸⁷ Haley, “epilogue,” *Malcolm X, The Autobiography*, 424.

⁸⁸ James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America (A Dream or a Nightmare)* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 290.

⁸⁹ He was made “the Nation’s first National Minister” in 1963 by Elijah Muhammad. See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 298.

⁹⁰ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 212.

⁹¹ Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, 2.

rumors spread about himself, because of his renowned personality, within the NoI. But these rumors should not be the object of our focus in investigating the process of his third identity crisis, since they did not effect Malcolm X at all. "When I heard these things [rumors about himself], they didn't anger me. They helped me to re-steel my inner resolve that such lies would never become true of me."⁹² Consequently, the beginning point of the process of his third major identity crisis took place when Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the NoI to whom Malcolm X was extremely attached, was faced with paternity suits from two former secretaries of the NoI. Malcolm X, who heard some hints about Elijah Muhammad's inappropriate relationship[s but immediately ignored them, was now shocked with the idea that Elijah Muhammad may have committed adultery, the very inappropriate behavior that caused his brother's (Reginald) suspension from the NoI, isolation from family and eventually his serious nervous breakdown.

Elijah Muhammad personally tells Malcolm X that the charges against him were true explaining them to be part of a prophecy he must have fulfill as the messenger of God. And Malcolm X, already susceptible to this kind of explanation since he spent twelve years of his life as an active member of the NoI believing its strange demonology, tries to convince himself that what Elijah Muhammad faced was not a morality issue. But the damage had already been done in Malcolm X's mind: "...around 1963... I spoke less and less of religion...I stayed wholly off the subject of morality."⁹³

With this damage in his devotion to Elijah Muhammad and thus the NoI, Malcolm X makes a comment to the reporters on the assassination of the president John Fitzgerald Kennedy, even though all ministers of the NoI were instructed not make any by Elijah Muhammad. Upon this incident, Malcolm X is silenced by Elijah Muhammad for ninety days.⁹⁴ Malcolm X did not object to this punishment. However, in the following days, Malcolm X realized that his silencing was more extensive: he was even forbidden "to teach in [his] own Mosque..."⁹⁵ According to Malcolm X, a false impression was deliberately given that he "had rebelled" against Elijah Muhammad: "I hadn't hustled in the streets for years for nothing. I knew when I was being set up." What is more, he even became aware of a "death talk" about himself. This was overwhelming for Malcolm X feeling betrayed by the NoI: "My head felt like it was bleeding inside. I felt like my brain was damaged."⁹⁶ Later, he even becomes aware of a "death-order" when his assassin, who was Malcolm X's own assistant, confesses to him instead of "doing the job." "This first direct death-order was how, finally, I began to arrive at my psychological divorce from the Nation of Islam."⁹⁷ As a result, in a press conference held after a while, Malcolm X announces that "[he] is going to organize and lead a new mosque in New York City known as the Muslim Mosque, Inc."⁹⁸ One thing really important about this process is that Malcolm X, in his Autobiography, never uses the word *break*. That is, his not using the word might be considered as an interesting indication of how strongly he was devoted to Elijah Muhammad, the NoI and its demonology. In fact, in an interview, when he was asked such a question as "why did you break with the Black Muslims?" his answer was the following: "I didn't break, there was a split. The split came about primarily because they put me out..."⁹⁹

⁹² Malcolm X, *Malcolm X, The Autobiography*, 294.

⁹³ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 298.

⁹⁴ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 305-6.

⁹⁵ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 307.

⁹⁶ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 307.

⁹⁷ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 313.

⁹⁸ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 321.

⁹⁹ Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, 158.

Consequently, it should be rewarding to investigate the incentives that led Malcolm X to leave the NoI and start an independent organization from it. Basically and most importantly, there are two points lying behind Malcolm X's decision to announce his independence from the NoI. The first one is related to Malcolm X's religious image. First of all, one should be reminded that religious image employed in mass movements has a powerful appeal. Malcolm X's new identity as a member and minister of the NoI, from the point where he first enjoyed being religious in prison, was entirely built on a religious image. Malcolm X, strongly believing the strange story about the origin of man aimed at the idea of black supremacy, had gained his self-esteem by espousing a new, frantically religious identity as Malcolm X. However, this identity and thus his self-esteem fell in jeopardy when he found out about his leader's inappropriate behavior, which was contradictory with his (Malcolm X) dedication and belief system that he espoused. Malcolm X, because of this incident, felt weak, powerless and, again, confused. The following excerpt perfectly illustrates Malcolm X's psychology: "Backstage at the Apollo Theater in Harlem one day, the comedian Dick Gregory looked at me. "'Man,' he said, '[Elijah] Muhammad's nothing but a ...' -I can't say the word he used. *Bam!* Just like that. My Muslim instincts said to attack Dick -but instead, I felt weak and hollow."¹⁰⁰

The second point, on the other hand, is strongly related to the sense of integrity about his life, which he gained out of his fully generative twelve years spent within the NoI as its devoted, true believer. In other words, with his sense of devotion to the NoI shaken and damaged, Malcolm X gets concerned about he was going to survive of him. Now he was, at least subconsciously, in search of an opportunity to leave a legacy behind as a reminder of himself, since he could not have accepted the idea of wasting his twelve years and possibly the rest of his life within the NoI, whose demonology was now not making much of a sense to him as satisfactory for the mission of his life. This incentive toward making sure that something survives of him, was so strong in Malcolm X that he keenly remembers a statement made by a reporter, and is inclined to construe it as a reinforcement of his independence from the NoI: "One of these [white reporters]...said, 'Malcolm X, the whites need your voice worse than the Negroes.'"¹⁰¹ As a result, Malcolm X seeing his self-esteem-providing religious image in danger and thus concerned about his future legacy, first admittedly breaks a rule by being in "contact with another Muslim in the 'isolated' state"¹⁰² and later ignores Elijah Muhammad's order by making a comment on the assassination of JFK, which became the reason for his being silenced leading to the 'split.'

Malcolm X, after eventually announcing his independence from the NoI, makes a pilgrimage to Mecca and, upon his return to the States, comes up with a totally new identity replacing his former ill perception which was based on a total opposition against white people. This pilgrimage had a profound impact on him. Actually, it should be noticed that, before he made his travel to Mecca, he had broken with the NoI and thus his strong belief in its demonology was proven futile. Thus, he was open to change and espouse new perceptions in place in place of the demonology, which he loved dearly. In other words, with the help of previous events, i.e. antecedents, prior to his pilgrimage, he was psychologically ready to come to understand that Islam, as presented by the NoI, was an immature form of religion and thus had only a wish-fulfilling function in his life.¹⁰³ Indeed, Malcolm X clearly states: "...my purpose for making the Hajj [pilgrimage] was to get an understanding of true Islam."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 300-301.

¹⁰¹ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 304.

¹⁰² Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 301.

¹⁰³ For the functions of immature forms of religion, see: Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and His Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1960) 61-62.

¹⁰⁴ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 353.

At the beginning of his pilgrimage to Mecca, based on his experience with other pilgrims in his plane, Malcolm X realizes that his skin color did not play a negative role in his being treated as a “human being”: “People seeing you as a Muslim saw you as a human being and they had a different look, different talk, everything.”¹⁰⁵ When he arrives at Cairo (Egypt) he gets impressed by a scene, which was unfamiliar to him: “Throng of people, obviously Muslims from every where, bound on the pilgrimage, were hugging and embracing. They were of all complexions, the whole atmosphere was of warmth and friendliness. The feeling hit me that there really wasn’t any color problem here.”¹⁰⁶ Moreover, one should add that, after taking off from Cairo Airport, Malcolm X becomes aware of the fact that one pilgrim was left out just to make space for himself: “We were on our plane, in the air, when I learned for the first time that with the crush, there was not supposed to have been space for me, but strings had been pulled, and someone had been put off because they didn’t want to disappoint an American Muslim...I had been paid such an honor and respect.”¹⁰⁷

Apart from the fact that he was already independent from the NOI, Malcolm X’s mind was in search and thus keenly perceptive throughout his pilgrimage, at least as much as that of a person who travels in exotic places, as he himself later points out: “My pilgrimage broadened my scope.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, he was very well able to screen out the attitude of people whom he met during his pilgrimage. On the other hand, those people he met were extremely nice to Malcolm X, as their Muslim brothers from America. Malcolm X observes: “Love, humility, and true brotherhood was almost a physical feeling wherever I turned.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, he was astonished by the kind of brotherhood of the totally strange people he never met during his pilgrimage: “I had never seen these men before in my life, and they treated me so good!”¹¹⁰ Finally, in Jeddah, Malcolm X is delicately taken care of by some people who, according to Malcolm X, would have been called white in America.¹¹¹ Overwhelmed with the favor these ‘white’ people did to him, Malcolm X only attributed their kindness to their intrinsic motivation and decided to change his rough perception about white people. Malcolm X specifically remembers when he began to change his perception of color: “[next] morning was when I first began to reappraise the ‘white man.’ It was then when I first began to perceive that ‘white man,’ as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily; primarily it described attitudes and actions.”¹¹² Thus, determined to change his radical attitude about white people, Malcolm X, observing the wide variety of people who came to Mecca for the purpose of pilgrimage, comes to the conclusion that there is intrinsically no difference between white and black people. To show how profound his change of perception of color was, an observation of Malcolm X’s is really worth mentioning here: “I remember one night at Muzdalifa [a place in Mecca] with nothing but the sky overhead I lay awake amid sleeping Muslim brothers and I learned that pilgrims from every land—every color, and class, and rank; high officials and the beggar alike—all snored in the same language.”¹¹³

Malcolm X returns from his travel as a changed man and with a new name, Malik el-Shabazz.¹¹⁴ Just as Malcolm X was not like Malcolm Little, the small-time street hustler, Malik el-Shabazz was not Malcolm X, especially in his perception of color. When he arrived

¹⁰⁵ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 326.

¹⁰⁶ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 326.

¹⁰⁷ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 328.

¹⁰⁸ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 367.

¹⁰⁹ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 330.

¹¹⁰ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 337. Also see these pages: 331, 334-5, 338, 339, 340, 343, 344, 349.

¹¹¹ See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 336, 338.

¹¹² Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 338.

¹¹³ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 349.

¹¹⁴ See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 414.

in New York, he clearly proclaimed the incredible change that led him to come up with his new name and identity: "In the past, yes, I have made sweeping indictments of *all* white people. I never will be guilty of that again."¹¹⁵

Consequently, after his travel to Mecca, it appears that Malcolm X leaves his third major identity crisis resolving it by coming to understand that the religion that he dearly embraced as Malcolm X was only "Elijah Muhammad's version of Islam"¹¹⁶ rather than the true Islam and there was no intrinsic difference between white and Black people: they were all human beings first.¹¹⁷ In other words, during his pilgrimage, he realized that the religion that he formerly espoused was only an immature form of religion and thus it only functioned in his twelve years spent within the NOI as to provide a self-fulfilling yet fake satisfaction. On the other hand, personally concluding that white and black people can get along, Malcolm X felt that he needed to be realistic. In this sense, with regard to his former attribution to the existence of black and white people, he needed a real sense of ego integrity.

Malcolm X, before his travel to Mecca, was a 'warrior of Armageddon.' After the travel, on the contrary, he becomes a man of peace and wisdom. Just as, in an interview with Gordon Parks, he confesses his one crucial regret: "Brother, [speaking to Gordon Parks] remember the time that white college girl came into restaurant -the one who wanted to help the Muslims and the Whites get together- and I told her there wasn't a ghost of a chance and she went away crying?... Well, I've lived to regret that incident."¹¹⁸

Lastly, our conception that these crises are extremely condensed in Malcolm X's life is also justified by an interestingly peaceful attitude of his, though arguable, when he was involved in the Black Muslim movement as a talented orator. In a 'gun battle' with police officers in Los Angeles, four of them got injured and a member of Black Muslims, Ronald Strokes, the secretary of the local mosque, was killed.¹¹⁹ Upon this incident, in a television show Malcolm X was asked by a reporter: "-Malcolm, what do you think will happen? Do you expect any violence? -[...] I think I will see violence... yes. I know that right now, we, as Muslims will go to our place of worship, our mosque, and pray to Allah to give us a sign that He can give justice to a people who in turn find it impossible to give justice to black people. Allah will show us that He can deal with you... Sir!"¹²⁰

Although Malcolm X later associated an American plane crash resulting in the death of around a hundred and twenty nine passengers and made a comment on it such that it was a retaliation of revenge directly coming from God,¹²¹ the above mentioned excerpt justifies us in concluding that Malcolm X, no matter how he was pictured as a violent activist, was peaceful and had the potential toward his last incredible change. As Malcolm himself states about his latest change: "...there was precedent in my life..."¹²² Interestingly, Alex Haley reports that Malcolm X, after his pilgrimage, even regret his comment on the plane crash: "'That's one of the things I wish I had never said.'"¹²³ In short, Malcolm X was a wise man with a total sense of integrity.

¹¹⁵ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 368.

¹¹⁶ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 364.

¹¹⁷ See: Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 369.

¹¹⁸ Malcolm X, *The Final Speeches*, 231.

¹¹⁹ According to Hakim Jamal, Ronald Strokes was killed on purpose. "They [police officers] admitted they knew he [Ronald] was not armed... yet they killed him." (Jamal, *From the Dead Level*, 199).

¹²⁰ Jamal, *From The Dead Level*, 199.

¹²¹ See: Jamal, *From the Dead Level*, 200-201. Also see: Haley "epilogue," Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 398-9.

¹²² Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 344.

¹²³ Haley, epilogue," Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 399.

In addition, as we have already mentioned, Malcolm X's experiencing the last problems of his life because of the condensation in his life cycle opens the door to the idea that solitude or even death would be the only way out of the 'impossible' demands of what has been gained as fame and power. Interestingly enough, we hear this wish from Malcolm X himself referring to his refusal of the help offered by the white college girl just because she was white: "I was a Zombie then... I was hypnotized, pointed in a certain direction and told to march... It cost me twelve years... The sickness and madness of those days -I'm glad to be free of them. It's a time for martyrs now."¹²⁴

Conclusion

In sum, psychological crisis in general and identity crisis in particular contribute to productivity and leadership. In this sense, the more one experiences crisis the more he/she becomes creative and productive. Malcolm X was an exceptional case in terms of identity crisis because he was black, i.e., minority with a slavery background, which provides an extremely intensive and harsh contribution to identity crisis. Because of the condensation of the crises that he was exposed to, he was under a heavy burden of demand of his fame and power. Moreover, he was a new-born leader of a new-born movement. Consequently, as the best way to seal his message, he should have gotten killed. And he did, to seal his message and to be loved as a hero as well.

Malcolm X, as the very product of his identity crises, is a great example of trying to find meaning and consistency to one's life. In fact, his identity crises were extremely severe and intense just because of the fact that he was born into a minority family with a historic slavery background, which still had effects on his life. In this sense, he was actually born into crises.

Malcolm X was able to achieve or protect a sense of who he is as a human being (or a sense of being somebody) with the inevitable conditions such as self-control, free will, etc. However, his sense of who he is was first exposed to serious damage when he was advised by his teacher to think of manual work as a future profession, though he was able and eager to become a lawyer. His eagerness to become a lawyer and thus to stay in school was lost because he was not psychologically allowed to pursue his own choice. Consequently, for the sake of feeling and becoming somebody, he chose streets as a small-time hustler.

Malcolm X ultimately ended up in prison. His decision to choose streets seemed to him to be the only way to preserve his self-esteem and independence as an individual; but it was proven futile when he ended up in prison where his freedom was more restrained than it was in school. Moreover, in his mind, his being sentenced to ten years was related to the same condition that led him to drop out of school: just as it was not "appropriate" for him to pursue certain professions, as it was for him to be together with white girls. Malcolm X was now extremely desperate about his future not being able to make sense of why he ended up in prison. Right at this point, Islam, as a "black religion," was introduced by his own family members, especially his brother named Reginald. The demonology of this religion, as preached by the NOI, offered Malcolm X a holistic framework concerning his existence, which was based on the idea of Black supremacy. As a result, everything began to make sense to Malcolm X: there was nothing intrinsically wrong with him and thus he was actually a victim of "white devils." Thus, he became a true believer of the NOI's version of Islam, since it was a shelter for him that provided a sense of identity. Coming to understand that there was nothing wrong with him, he was to enjoy the only freedom he was allowed to have: the freedom of reading or the freedom *through* reading. As he self-educated himself, his belief in

¹²⁴ Haley, "epilogue," Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 429. Also see: Malcolm X, *The Final Speeches*, 231.

the NoI's version of Islam grew so strongly that he was later able to resolve and overcome the conflict he was faced with when his very brother who introduced him to Islam was driven out of the NoI.

However, Malcolm X was to be faced with another major crisis when he became aware of the inappropriate behavior of the leader of the NoI, which weakened Malcolm X's strong belief in its demonology. As a result, Malcolm X's sense of who he was in jeopardy again. With his confused identity, first he left the NoI and made travel to Mecca, the holy city of pilgrimage of Islam. During this pilgrimage, he came to understand that Black and White people were first human beings and thus they might get along. Though he announced he was independent from the NoI before he made the travel, only during his pilgrimage did he give up his belief in the demonology that he previously believed in as a minister of the NoI. For this reason, his pilgrimage is extremely important since it provided him with his last incredible change and thus a new identity as an orthodox Muslim. Since his last change was a proof of his sincere belief in the demonology of the NoI and thus an indicator of how much he suffered from his identity crises, it made him to be worthwhile to be remembered in the same line with heroes. His early 'death' was only a reinforcement factor for his memory and message to deserve a valuable place in people's minds.