On the Dialectical Evolution of Malcolm X's Anti-Capitalist Critique: Interrogating His Political Philosophy of Black Nationalism

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Introductory Remarks

In this chapter, “On the Dialectical Evolution of Malcolm X's Anti-Capitalist Critique: Interrogating His Political Philosophy of Black Nationalism,” our objective is to provide the reader with an opportunity to reflect on two major considerations regarding the complex meaning attached to his life and thought. The first part of our presentation focuses on Malcolm X’s historical and political relevance for the twenty-first century. Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz) died in 1965, yet the question of his relevance for us today is not a trivial concern and indeed it is a pressing matter of highest importance. In truth for many readers, particularly the generations born since the time of his death, Malcolm X principally remains an iconic, if not a mythic, figure (Horne, 1993: 440–450; Flick, 1981: 166–181). After careful study of this section of our presentation (and especially for our younger audience) the reader will gain a substantial and critical appreciation of Malcolm’s legacy for the burning political issues that we face in the United States and our world today.

The second part of our presentation is philosophical in method. This latter segment addresses the issue of interrogating Malcolm’s political philosophy of Black Nationalism. Pivotal to our philosophical analysis is the critical examination of Malcolm’s dialectical evolution as a Black Nationalist philosopher, which orbits around the development of his burgeoning anti-capitalist critique. The theoretical complexity of Black nationalism and Malcolm’s locus as thinker, within this context, is illuminated from the perspective of dialectical and historical materialism. The critique of the false conception that Black Nationalism is strictly reducible to a race analysis serves as our presumptive context. In the last year of Malcolm’s life, he expended great intellectual effort to gain new clarity about the problems ancillary with racism, national oppression, and capitalist class exploitation. We conclude that Malcolm’s intellectual effort unfolds as a dialectical process of development. In his endeavor to shape the needed revolutionary weapons for African American liberation, as Malcolm X grew in his understanding, he accordingly revised his political
philosophy. These revisions and corrections in Malcolm's political philosophy directly mirror how he became more profoundly engaged in his examination of the African American condition and world situation.

**On Malcolm X’s Relevance for the Twenty-First Century**

On May 29, 1964, Malcolm X stated: “A chicken just doesn’t have it within its system to produce a duck egg. It can’t do it. It can only produce according to what that particular system was constructed to produce. The system of this country cannot produce freedom for an Afro-American. It is impossible for this system, this economic system, this political system, this social system, as it stands, to produce freedom right now for the black man in this country” (Malcolm X, 1966: 68–69). It appropriately follows that any consideration of Malcolm X as thinker/activist for the twenty-first century must be cognizant that some fifty years ago, he brought to our attention how the imperialist interests of the United States government and its ruling class – today often framed on the rhetoric of global capitalism/empire and the ruling one percent – in systemically hegemonic fashion remains dialectically part and parcel of the conditions of African American political impotency, social oppression, and economic exploitation. In his now well-known speech, “The Ballot or The Bullet,” Malcolm explicitly states that Black people are “the victims of democracy” (Malcolm X, 1966: 26; Wolfenstein, 1993).

Malcolm keenly understands that African American oppression is not only the result of overtly individualized acts of racism; more appreciably it is structural and systemic and thus grounded in the very makeup of the U.S. political, legal, economic, and social order inclusive of an imperialist/racist international character. Malcolm opines:

In order for you and me to know the nature of the struggle that you and I are involved in, we have to know not only the various ingredients involved at the local level and national level, but also the ingredients that are involved at the international level. And the problems of the Black man here in this country today have ceased to be a problem of just the American Negro or an American problem. It has become a problem that is so complex, and has so many implications in it, that you have to study it in its entire world, in the world context or in its international context, to really see it as it actually is.

Malcolm X continues:

In the Black communities, the economy of the community is not in the hands of the Black man. The Black man is not his own landlord. The