

# Malcolm X's Internationalism and the Struggle for Liberation in Haiti Today

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*"...when you select heroes about which black children ought to be taught, let them be black heroes who have died fighting for the benefit of black people. We never were taught about Christophe or Dessalines. It was the slave revolt in Haiti when slaves, black slaves, had the soldiers of Napoleon tied down and forced him to sell one half of the American continent to the Americans. They don't teach us that. This is the kind of history we want to learn." - Malcolm X[1]*

February 21, 2015 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Malcolm X who is firmly located within the ranks of the foremost luminaries of Pan-Afrikanism.[2] As such, he was very much concerned with the fate of Afrikans across the globe. The broadness of Malcolm's humanity and sympathy informed his internationalism, which included all oppressed peoples, especially the racialized ones who have experienced the lashes of global white supremacy.[3]

This year, 2015, also marks the commencement of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States' invasion and occupation of Haiti, the 11th anniversary of the Western-backed coup against the democratically-elected government Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the current MINUSTAH occupation, and the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the devastating 2010 earthquake. The outlook of this ardent Pan-Afrikanist and internationalist, Malcolm X, ought to have relevance to the organized solidarity that anti-imperialists and Pan-Afrikanists should be demonstrating toward the labouring classes in Haiti.

One of the most important anti-imperialist struggles in the Americas today is the occupation of Haiti by western imperialism by way of the *United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti* (MINUSTAH).[4] As long as this military occupation is in effect, the individuals and organizations who claim to be champions of the self-determination and independence of oppressed people should be organizing to end it. The people of Haiti are actively resisting the neocolonial regime and the occupation force that have been imposed on them. The people are making Are we, internationalists, playing our part as comrades-in-arms with "the wretched of the earth" in Haiti?

Haiti's legacy of materially contributing to the independence struggles in South America and Central America, and accelerating the end to slavery in the Americas ought to inspire a higher level of commitment for its popular struggle on the ground. The Haitian Revolution clearly demonstrated the creative genius, boldness, resilience and self-reliance of a dispossessed people when they are motivated by a compelling idea or vision. Hence, the labouring classes in Haiti are heirs to a revolutionary tradition that affirms the capacity of

the socially damned to assert themselves on the stage of history as dramatic actors.

It was not an accident that Malcolm made connection to the Haitian Revolution in his effort to achieve human rights for Afrikan Americans. He expressed admiration for its example of militancy and courage in checkmating white supremacy, enslavement and colonialism, "[Frederick] Douglass was great. I would rather have been taught about Toussaint L'Ouverture. We need to be taught about who fought, who bled for freedom and made others bleed." [5] Malcolm told his followers that history was a very instructive and wise teacher and worthy of emulation. He encouraged them to "examine the historic method used all over the world by others who have problem similar to yours." [6] The enslaved Afrikans in Haiti used revolutionary violence to assert that the slogan "equality, liberty and fraternity[solidarity]" was applicable to their struggle for emancipation.

One of the most admirable and central elements of Malcolm's contribution to the Afrikan Revolutionary Tradition was his internationalist and Pan-Afrikanist thoughts and politics. Temkin states that there are much to learn from engaging the internationalist thoughts of Malcolm in areas such as "human rights, the politics of citizenship, the impact of decolonization, anti-imperialism, the global and black left, and the tension between geopolitics and individual or collective political action." [7] This Afrikan revolutionary was preoccupied with strategically internationalizing the national struggle of Afrikans inside the United States.

He saw the significance of connecting the global struggles for emancipation of the peoples of Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Afrika. This ideological orientation is evidenced in this declaration:

1964 will see the Negro revolt evolve and merge into the worldwide black revolution that has been taking place on this earth since 1945. The so-called revolt will become a real black revolution. Now the black revolution has been taking place in Africa and Asia and Latin America; when I say black, I mean non-white - black, brown, red or yellow. [8]

The common experience of colonialism and white supremacy created the basis for unity of purpose in the eyes of Malcolm. This political sensibility informed his framing of the resistance of the racialized world to European colonialism and the thrust toward independence. It is important to note that this United States-based internationalist held the national resistance struggle of Afrikan Americans as an integral part of the "worldwide black revolution."

This fight for liberation from white supremacy and imperialism made solidarity and mutual aid among the racialized world majority an objective and existential necessity, from the vantage point of Malcolm's internationalist outlook. It is for the preceding reason that Malcolm lavished unbridled, albeit unnuanced, praise on the 1955 *Bandung Conference* that pulled together independent Afrikan and Asian states to further economic cooperation and provide collective resistance to the colonialism and hegemony of the white imperial or major powers. [9]

The work that took place at the *Bandung Conference* led to the emergence of the *Non-Aligned Movement* of states that stood outside of the West and the former Soviet Union and its state socialist Eastern European allies. Bandung's unity was seen by Malcolm as a "model for the same procedure you and I [Afrikans in America] can use to get our problem solved." [10]

Malcolm's extensive visits to Afrika and Western Asia (Middle East)[11] broadened his internationalist perspective and framing of issues such as black nationalism,[12] the emancipation of women,[13] capitalism as a predator,[14] imperialism as a global system of exploitation,[15] cooperation with whites,[16] and the role of one's religious beliefs in the secular struggle for emancipation.[17] Malcolm's political development led him to see the "worldwide revolution" in revolt against an "international western power structure" or a "giant international combine" (imperialism) that ruled the peoples and exploited the resources of the global South.[18] From the time of Malcolm's *Message to the Grassroots* in late 1963 to his "worldwide revolution" speech on February 15, 1965, one can see a drastic shift from the overly racializing of the struggle against imperialism to the integration of an economic analysis into his understanding of global white supremacy and western imperialism.

Malcolm's understanding of class and race oppression and a developing gender analysis informed his framing of Afrikan American oppression within a radical internationalist framework. This internationalizing of the struggle made him a dangerous figure in the eyes of the United States[19] and to the "international western power structure" as evidenced by the French state denying him entry onto its national territory.[20] The preceding state of affairs which indicate the willingness of the forces of oppression to collaborate or act as one across borders in order to maintain their systems of domination. As such, it is a moral and political obligation, on the part of the oppressed, to strategize and cooperate transnationally, otherwise a revolution in one country would be quite vulnerable.

What lessons or insights should we draw from Malcolm's international solidarity and global justice orientation on the question of MINUSTAH's occupation of Haiti and the popular struggle against neoliberal capitalism and the occupier?

A central component of Malcolm's attempt at internationalizing the struggle of Afrikans in the United States was to seek intervention before international bodies such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Organization of American States.[21] He was especially fixated on the UN as the forum in which the classification of the racist oppression of Afrikan Americans as a struggle for human right as opposed to one for civil rights, would have placed it "completely out of the jurisdiction of the United States government.[22]

The OAU, a body of strongmen, neocolonial agents and kleptocrats, was seen by Malcolm as a body that would demonstrate solidarity with the human rights struggle of Afrikan Americans. However, when this continental group had the opportunity to openly and vigorously challenge the trampling of the human rights of Afrikan Americans, the OAU took the path of least resistance by passing a "moderate resolution against "racial oppression.""[23]

Malcolm overestimated inexplicably gave too much credit to the usefulness of the two-thirds votes of the "continent of Africa, coupled with the Asian and Arab bloc" in the General Assembly.[24] The Security Council is the seat of power and action at the UN and each of the five permanent members (Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States) wields a veto over its decisions. For example, the UN's Security Council intervention in the Congo in July 1960 was a classic case of the UN being used by western powers to retain this country within its sphere of influence<sup>[25]</sup> and checkmate the feared influence of the former Soviet Union and its military support to the Patrice Lumumba-led government.[26]

Given the current occupation of Haiti by the UN on behalf of western states such as Canada, France and the United States, it is clear that this international institution and its Security Council are not allies in the struggle for human rights in the global South. The UN's General Assembly may serve, at best, as the conscience of the world and a place for moral victory for causes related to the oppressed. We could look at the case of the United States economic embargo against Cuba or the Palestinians' quest for self-determination enjoys solid support in the General Assembly, but have foundered on the shore of inaction at the Security Council.

The UN tends to intervene in a country when it is in the interests of western states to do so. Its military presence in Haiti provides legitimacy to western powers' and the local ruling elite's attempt to weaken the development or strengthening of a people's movement that might undermine capitalism and the geo-strategic interests of imperialism.

Malcolm's appeal to states or international bodies and the questionable efficacy of such an approach ought to lead us in the direction of movements from below as the principal way to challenge imperialism in Haiti, and everywhere. The operators of the state are fearful of the autonomous organizing of the people. As such, they will seek to undermine the existence of independent, oppositional organizations and movements. The state might do so through co-opting the leaders with material incentives or use the security services to repress both leaders and members by way of the security services.

It was the mobilization of the masses or the fear of them being mobilized that pushed colonial powers such as France and Britain in Afrika[27] and the Caribbean to embark on the path of formal independence. Malcolm claimed that the pre-independence nationalism and consciousness of the people in Afrika had been "fanned from a spark into a roaring flame" and made things too hot for colonialism.[28]

Malcolm's faith in the "grass roots out there in the streets" acting independently of the politically compromised leadership and driving fear in the power structure[29] is a more fruitful direction in which to oppose the occupation in Haiti. In fact, this is the very approach that the popular movement in Haiti has been using to challenge the western-backed president Michel Martelly and MINUSTAH's occupation.[30] In 1986, a mobilized Haitian populace brought an end to the Duvalier regime and paved the way for the emergence of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the organizational expression of their self-determination in the form of [Fanmi Lavalas](#).

In spite of state violence being directed at the masses in the streets, they continue to demand a future that centres their economic, social and political interests. Malcolm's evolving international solidarity politics calls for active involvement with the masses in revolt. He would have encouraged people outside of Haiti to stand with the people of Haiti, given his admiration of the Haitian Revolution. He told a group at a public lecture in France that an effective way to help Afrikan Americans would be to intervene when the police "grab and arrest us, let them know, well, that they shouldn't have done it." [31] While Malcolm did not specify the range of actions that should be taken by these would-be internationalists, we have at our disposal a number of initiatives that can be taken to express our solidarity with the people in Haiti.[32]

After all, the struggle in Haiti is a part of the worldwide "black revolution" and the fight against the "international western power structure." All freedom loving peoples across the globe, and especially those living in the Americas have an anti-imperialist obligation to

support the people of Haiti as they resist the oppressive forces that are aligned against them.[33]

A number of Latin American states have contributed military and police personnel to MINUSTAH's occupation of Haiti. Many organizations in that region have started to organize to force an end to the occupation of Haiti. Internationalists in North America, Europe, Afrika and Asia need to systematically mobilize, educate and organize the people to drive out the occupation and allow the people of Haiti to determine their own path to development. The victory of Haiti in ending slavery and asserting its political independence lit the flame of freedom across the Americas.

Haiti could once again become the trailblazer of emancipation and revolutionary fortitude. Internationalists who are in agreement with Malcolm X's internationalism and global justice commitments ought to actively support the fight for self-determination, independence and development of the labouring classes in Haiti. It is not enough to issue meaningless praises for Malcolm's internationalism or be infatuated with the Haitian Revolution. We need to demonstrate our international solidarity with Haiti by working in organizations in our respective countries to support and complement the work being carried out by Haitians to secure their liberation.

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Notes:

[1] Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970/1992), 125.

[2] Hakim Adi & Marika Sherwood, *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 123-128.

[3] George Breitman, ed., *Malcom X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1965/1989), 217-218

[4] Kevin Edmonds and Ajamu Nangwaya, "The United Nations Will Fail Haiti Once Again: Pull Out the Occupation Troops," *CounterPunch*, October 14, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/10/14/the-united-nations-will-fail-haiti-once-again/>

[5] Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, 124.

[6] Breitman, *Malcom X Speaks*, 8.

[7] Moshik Temkin, "From Black Revolution to "Radical Humanism": Malcolm X between Biography and International History," *Humanity Journal* 3, 2, (2012): 268.

[8] Breitman, *Malcom X Speaks*, 49-50.

[9] *Ibid.*, 5-6.

[10] Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, 5.

[11] Temkin, *From Black Revolution*, 277. According to Temkin, the United States was startled by the leaders that Malcolm was associating with, "He met with a number of heads of state, including

Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Gamal Abdel-Nasser of Egypt, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea, and Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria—charismatic postcolonial leaders who saw themselves as defying the Western powers and whose varying fusions of African-style socialism and Pan-Africanism (or Pan-Arabism) appealed to Malcolm X's evolving conception of power politics. What made American officials most nervous about Malcolm X's comings and goings was that they considered all these leaders either potential or active allies of the Soviet Union" (p. 277).

[12] Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, 159-60.

[13] Ibid., 179.

[14] Breitman, *Malcom X Speaks*, 120-122.

[15] Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, 116-17.

[16] Bruce Perry, editor, *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1989) 147.

[17] Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, 180; Perry, *The Last Speeches*, 157.

[18] Perry, *The Last Speeches*, 127.

[19] Temkin, *From Black Revolution*, 277.

[20] Temkin, *From Black Revolution*, 282-83; Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, 167-73;

[21] Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, 87-88; Breitman, *Malcom X Speaks*, 72-87.

[22] Steve Clark, ed., *Malcolm X Speaks to Young People: Speeches in the United States, Britain, and Africa*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1965/2002) 79.

[23] Temkin, *From Black Revolution*, 277; <sup>[23]</sup> Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, 84.

[24] Clark, *Malcolm X Speaks to Young People*, 80.

[25] Abayomi Azikiwe, "Congo still struggles for real independence," *Workers World*, July 15, 2010. Retrieved from [http://www.workers.org/2010/world/congo\\_0722/](http://www.workers.org/2010/world/congo_0722/)

[26] Tom Eley, "Fifty years since the murder of Patrice Lumumba," *World Socialist Web Site*, January 22 2011, Retrieved from <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2011/01/lumu-j22.html>; Adam Hochschild, "An Assassination's Long Shadow," *New York Times*, January 16, 2011. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/17/opinion/17hochschild.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/17/opinion/17hochschild.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

[27] Firoze Manji, "What's Left in Africa? Reflections on the failure of left, working class movements to take root in most of Africa," *International Viewpoint*, February 5, 2015 5 February 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3853>

[28] Clark, *Malcolm X Speaks to Young People*, 58.

[29] Breitman, *Malcom X Speaks*, 14,

[30] Kim Ives & Isabelle Papillon, "Haiti: Two Days of Demonstrations and General Strike: "Down with

the UN Occupation", "Down with the President and Prime Minister,"" *Global Research*, February 11, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.globalresearch.ca/haiti-two-days-of-demonstrations-and-general-strike-down-with-he-un-occupation-down-with-the-president-and-prime-minister/5430662>

[31] Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, 126.

[32] Ajamu Nangwaya, "Transform your Global Justice Sentiments into Action to End the Occupation of Haiti," *Dissident Voice*, October 23, 2014. Retrieved from <http://dissidentvoice.org/2014/10/transform-your-global-justice-sentiments-into-action-to-end-the-occupation-of-haiti/>

[33] Ajamu Nangwaya, "We have an anti-imperialist obligation to the people of Haiti," *Rabble.ca*, February 28, 2014. Retrieved from <http://rabble.ca/news/2014/02/we-have-anti-imperialist-obligation-to-people-haiti>

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