



When the Master Enlarged the House

El - Hajj Malik el - Shabazz (Malcolm X), Secular Subjugation and the Colonised Muslim Mind

Introduction

Secularism is often presented as the neutral separation of religion and state. In reality, it is the subjugation of religion by the state. Religion may exist, but only within the boundaries determined by secular authority. It may regulate prayer, fasting, marriage and burial, but it must not challenge the state's sovereignty, laws, political order or definition of public life.

This subjugation becomes most effective when those subjected to it no longer recognise it as subjugation. This is what makes Malcolm X's analogy so relevant.

Malcolm X spoke of two slaves: the field slave and the house slave.

The field slave lived far from the master's house. He worked under the sun, slept in a shack, ate the worst food and wore whatever was thrown his way. His back carried the marks of the whip and his body carried the exhaustion of the plantation.

But there was one thing he understood clearly: the master was the master, and the slave was the slave. The master's house was not his house. The master's wealth was not his wealth. The master's security was not his security.

If the master's house caught fire, he did not confuse the burning of the master's property with the destruction of his own future. He might even pray for the wind to blow harder.

If someone whispered, "Let us escape," he did not first demand a detailed proposal, a guaranteed salary, a furnished home and a complete political programme. He understood that freedom was better than comfortable slavery, and that any hardship he would endure on leaving the plantation would be a small price to pay for his freedom.

The house slave was different.

He lived closer to the master. He ate the leftovers from the master's table. He wore the master's discarded clothes. He slept beneath the master's roof and enjoyed a little more comfort than the slave in the field.

And because the master allowed him to live near the house, he began to imagine that he belonged in the house. When the master said, "We have a fine house," the house slave replied, "Yes, we have a fine house." When the master became sick, he asked, "What is wrong with us?" When the master's house caught fire, he ran faster than the master to extinguish the flames.

When the field slave spoke about leaving the plantation, the house slave became terrified.

"Leave and go where?"

"Who will feed us?"

"Who will protect us?"

"Where will we find a house as beautiful as this?"

He had become so attached to the house that he could no longer imagine himself outside it. He was still owned by the master, but he had begun to think with the master's mind. The master's comfort became his comfort. The master's danger became his danger. The master's enemies became his enemies.

His body belonged to the plantation but, more importantly, his imagination too belonged to the plantation.



Where the analogy of el- Hajj Malik el-Shabazz (Malcolm X) ends and our extension of it begins

Malcolm X's original analogy ends with the house slave's identification with the master.

What follows is our extension of that analogy.

What happened when formal slavery was abolished while the master's institutions, values and definitions of civilisation remained dominant?

The master could no longer maintain the plantation in its old form. He could no longer leave the majority visibly chained in the field while keeping only a few loyal servants inside the house.

So the master changed his method. He did not abandon the house. He enlarged it.

He extended its walls across the plantation. He built more rooms, opened more doors and invited the former field slaves inside. He gave one of them a desk, another a uniform, another a degree, another a position, another a vote and another a small piece of property. He taught them all the language of the house. He taught them its history, its laws, its values and its definition of success.

He told them, "This is your house too." But the master still held the title deed.

He still designed the foundations. He still decided which language would be spoken inside the house, which values would govern it and which futures could be imagined beyond it. The slaves were no longer chained outside the house. They were incorporated into it.

The master discovered that he did not need to force people to defend his house if he could persuade them that the house was theirs. He did not need to silence every criticism himself. The new occupants would silence one another.

He did not need to whip anyone who dreamed of leaving. Those who had been given better rooms would ridicule the dreamers as backward, ungrateful and dangerous.

The master had succeeded in turning almost all of the slaves who inhabited the plantation into house slavery. And this is where many Muslims find themselves today.

The Muslim Inside the Secular House

We live inside the enormous house of the secular liberal nation-state. We are given passports, professions, political parties, university degrees, government positions and carefully managed spaces in which to practise our religion.

We are allowed to pray in one room, fast in another, marry in another and bury our dead in another.



But the foundations of the house remain secular. Its understanding of man is secular. Its political authority is secular. Its conception of freedom, law, morality, education, economics and progress is built upon assumptions that did not come from Islam.

Yet many Muslims have lived inside the house for so long that they no longer see it as one political and civilizational arrangement among others. They see it as reality itself.

They have become captivated by secular categories, unable to imagine politics, law, citizenship or freedom except through the concepts supplied by the house.

When the state says, “our national interest,” they repeat, “our national interest.”

When it says, “our values,” they respond, “our values.”

When it speaks about “our constitution,” “our democracy,” “our borders,” “our military,” “our national team” and “our way of life,” they adopt its precise language without asking who defined that “our.”

When the house is criticised, they rush to defend it. When its foundations are questioned, they become offended.

When someone says that the Muslim’s highest political allegiance and loyalty is to the Ummah and that Islam cannot be permanently confined to a private room inside a secular house, they react like the house slave:

“Where is your alternative?”

“How will you survive?”

“Who will protect you?”

“Do you want to destroy everything?”

“Why can you not simply be grateful for your room?”

They have mistaken accommodation for ownership. They have mistaken participation for authority. They have mistaken being permitted to enter the house for being permitted to redesign it.

Their positions are often intellectually inconsistent and theologically incoherent. They affirm that Islam is a complete way of life, yet insist that its political, economic and legal vision must remain permanently subordinate to secular authority.

They are conceptually confused: Muslim in personal ritual, secular in public thought; Islamic in vocabulary, liberal in assumption; loyal to the Ummah in sentiment, but politically domesticated by the nation-state.



This contradiction creates a deep cognitive dissonance. They continue to speak the language of Islamic supremacy while accepting the permanent supremacy of secular institutions. Rather than confront the contradiction, they reinterpret Islam until it fits comfortably inside the house of the master.

And because the house gives certain Muslims better rooms, those Muslims become its most enthusiastic defenders. They are invited into parliament, universities, courts, political organisations and civic institutions. They are praised as moderate, progressive and responsible.

Soon they begin to police the other Muslims on behalf of the house. They tell us which parts of Islam may remain in the prayer room and which parts must never enter the public hallway. They teach us how to translate Islam into the language of secular liberalism until very little remains except religious decoration.

Some become useful mouthpieces for the system. They use Islamic language to legitimise secular assumptions and use religious authority to persuade Muslims that submission to the house is maturity, realism and wisdom.

They do not merely live within the system. The system begins to live within them.

They become uncritically assimilated, ideologically captive and politically domesticated. They may possess degrees, titles and impressive vocabularies, yet remain philosophically naïve and epistemically shallow, unable to recognise the assumptions beneath the concepts they repeat.

They are educated, but intellectually colonised. They know how to speak inside the house, but they no longer know how to think beyond it. But outside the main rooms of the house, a few Muslims are still calling:

“This house is not the horizon of human possibility.”

“We had a house before this house.”

“We have foundations of our own.”

“We have a civilisation to rebuild.”

“We have an Ummah to awaken.”

They are not calling Muslims to ignorance, isolation or the rejection of everything produced by others. A Muslim may enter the workshop and learn engineering. He may study medicine in the university. He may learn administration from the institutions, technology from the laboratories, media from the studios and organisation from the companies.



But he must remember why he entered.

He did not enter merely to become the master's most efficient servant. He did not learn architecture so that he could spend his entire life decorating the master's rooms. He did not learn engineering so that he could strengthen the walls that imprison his people's imagination. He did not learn law only to become a more eloquent defender of the master's constitution. He did not learn media only to persuade Muslims to love the plantation. He enters, learns what is beneficial, masters the tools and returns to help build the house of the Ummah.

The Muslim may learn how the master built his house without accepting that it is the only house that can ever exist. He may borrow a tool without inheriting the master's worldview. He may work inside the house without surrendering the map of his own home.

The Driver and the Engine

The secular order is far more generous than its critics expect. It will make room for a Muslim mayor. It will make room for a Muslim member of parliament, a Muslim minister, a Muslim judge, a Muslim general and, in principle, a Muslim head of state. It will photograph the moment, celebrate it as proof of its own openness and offer it to the world as evidence that the house now belongs to everyone.

And it can afford to be generous, because it is not anxious about who sits in the driver's seat. It is anxious only about the engine. It does not care much about whose hands are on the wheel, provided the engine that moves the vehicle remains its own engine, built to its own design, burning its own fuel and carrying everyone towards its own destination.

That is the arrangement, stated plainly. You may drive, but you may not build. You may steer, but only along roads that have already been laid. You may hold the highest office in the house, provided you govern by the rules and assumptions of the house.

And the engine is not neutral. It carries within it a settled account of what a human being is, where authority comes from, what law is for, how morality is decided and who has the final word. That account did not come from revelation and, on the questions that matter most, it does not agree with revelation. This is where representation stops being an answer. The difficulty was never about who occupies the office. The difficulty is what the office was built to do.

The South African Constitution says as much, and it says it with admirable candour. It deserves to be read carefully rather than sentimentally.



Section 15(1) guarantees everyone the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion. That promise is real, and in the ordinary run of life it is generously kept. But section 31(1), which protects the right of a religious community to practise its religion, is immediately qualified by section 31(2): those rights may not be exercised in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights. Section 30 imposes the identical qualification on culture and language. Section 15(3) permits legislation recognising systems of personal and family law adhered to by persons professing a particular religion, but only on condition that such recognition is consistent with the other provisions of the Constitution. Section 36 permits every right to be limited by a law of general application. And section 2 settles the hierarchy beyond argument: the Constitution is the supreme law, and law or conduct inconsistent with it is invalid.

Read together, those provisions say something exact. Religion is free to the extent that it does not collide with the rest of the document. Where there is no clash, there is liberty, and real liberty at that. Where there is a clash, revelation yields.

That is the trap, and it is an elegant one, because for most of a Muslim's life there is no clash at all. Prayer does not clash. Fasting does not clash. Zakat, burial, the masjid, the madrasah and the whole fragrance of Ramadan do not clash. The Muslim therefore experiences the arrangement as freedom, and in those things he is not wrong to feel free. But the absence of a clash in the private room tells him nothing about what happens in the public hallway.

The clash lies where Islam speaks about law, authority, the family, wealth, sexual morality and the ordering of public life. Precisely there, the Constitution has already decided, in advance and in writing, who must give way.

Nor is this a theoretical worry. The Constitutional Court in **Christian Education South Africa v Minister of Education** [2000] ZACC 11; 2000 (4) SA 757 (CC), accepted that the blanket prohibition of corporal punishment genuinely limited a sincerely held religious practice, and upheld the prohibition. In *Prince v President, Cape Law Society* [2002] ZACC 1; 2002 (2) SA 794 (CC), the Court accepted that cannabis was central to Rastafari worship, and still refused to carve out a religious exemption. In each case the believer was heard with courtesy, and in each case the believer lost. That is not judicial hostility. That is the engine running exactly as it was designed to run.

So the Muslim mayor governs by the Constitution. The Muslim minister swears to uphold it. The Muslim judge applies it, and applies it against the claims of his own religion when the two collide, because that is his oath and that is his office. He has been given the wheel. He has not been given



the engine, and he will never be given the title deed.

Revelation, for its part, is not silent about who owns the engine.

“Judgment belongs to none but Allah ﷻ. He has commanded that you worship none but Him. That is the upright religion, but most people do not know.” (Surah Yusuf, 12:40)

“Is it the judgment of ignorance that they seek? And for a people of certain faith, who is better in judgement than Allah ﷻ?” (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:50)

The first verse settles where ultimate authority lies. The second asks the question the house does not permit to be asked aloud: by whose judgement, in the end, are we actually governed? A Muslim may hold high office honourably, serve his countrymen justly and do a great deal of good from within. What he may not do is mistake the keys for the title deed, or imagine that because he has been trusted to drive, he has been trusted to decide where the vehicle is going.

From Colonisation to Colonisability

Colonial domination did not merely occupy Muslim lands and dismantle Muslim institutions. Over time, it cultivated **colonisability** within the Muslim mind: an internal readiness to be governed by foreign assumptions, to measure Islam according to secular approval and to regard the institutions that subordinate it as natural, neutral and permanent.

This is why Malcolm X's analogy is so apt.

The first step towards freedom is recognising that one is not already free. As long as the house slave believes that the master's house is his own, he will feel no desire to leave it. He will protect its walls, defend its foundations and fear every possibility beyond them.

In the same way, as long as Muslims imagine secularism to be neutral, natural and permanent, they will not recognise their subjugation. They will merely seek a better room within the house. But when we understand that secularism places Islam beneath the authority of the state, something changes.

Recognition of subjugation creates the desire for liberation. The Muslim begins to ask:

Why must revelation remain confined to private life?

Why must the state determine which parts of Islam may enter the public sphere?

Why must the Ummah understand politics, law and civilisation only through categories created by others?



The purpose is not reckless isolation from, or the rejection of, all beneficial knowledge. Muslims may study, work, cooperate and participate within existing institutions. But we must do so without surrendering our imagination. We may learn the master's skills without inheriting his worldview. We may use his tools without accepting his house as the only house that can ever exist.

Conclusion

The greatest victory of the secular order is not that Muslims live under it. It is that many Muslims can no longer imagine life beyond it. The task before the Ummah is therefore greater than gaining recognition, representation or a more comfortable room within the existing house.

We must first recognise our subjugation. A person who believes himself free will never seek liberation, and a people who mistake their prison for their home will decorate its walls rather than search for the door.

Recognising that secularism subordinates Islam to the authority of the state must awaken within us the desire to be free. That desire must drive us to break our intellectual, political and civilisational dependence upon the categories of the secular nation-state.

We had foundations before this house. We possess a revelation by which every house, constitution and civilisation must be judged. We have an Ummah to awaken and a civilisation to rebuild.

There is a difference between living under a system and believing in it.

There is a difference between using its tools and inheriting its worldview.

Above all, there is a difference between working with a system and becoming the system.

And there is a difference between being handed the steering wheel and being trusted with the engine.

Wake up, O' Ummah!

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