

# **Let Empire collapse**

**why we need a decolonial revolution**

Mohamed Abdou

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I am part of a We that says: “Let Empire collapse.” A We that says to build alternatives to Empire, we must expose the illegitimacy of the dreadful dream we are in. Instead of trying to shore or salvage the world as it is, we need to recognize with Audre Lorde that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

I am part of a We that says: “We love and respect you, Angela Davis and your behemoth ongoing legacy of indispensable teachings that are fundamental to the centuries-old struggle we confront,” but we will not be castigated into voting or fall into the trap of “lesser of two evil” arguments that have been critiqued time and time again.

We do not buy the story that we are at a crossroads and have the opportunity to finally fulfill America’s promise by ushering in a new era of Dwight D. Eisenhower-inspired eco-friendly dominance. We are not fooled by the repackaged, false, liberal-progressive hope of a Joe Biden-Kamala Harris-Bernie Sanders coalition that normalizes — rather than contends with — America’s imperialist settler-colonial existence. And which by design cannot allow life-saving reforms such as universal healthcare, student debt cancellations, housing and immigrant rights, racial and environmental justice, abolitionist defunding and dismantlement initiatives and worker protections.

We anticipated Donald J. Trump’s ascendance and expected Bernie Sanders’ demise when few did. We tell you, here, now, as a cautionary tale that it will be no surprise if Trump wins a second term. In fact, the seeds for his potential victory were laid the day of his inauguration because of how resistance and liberation came to be defined — as resistance to Trump rather than liberation from settler-colonial oppression.

## Who “We” are

Who is this “We”? We are Black, brown, Indigenous, Muslim and Jewish people who are radical “newest social movement” organizers and knowledge keepers. We are not just anti-fascist writers and movement participants, but also, outrightly anti-statist and anti-capitalist and have contributed to, and argued for, self-determination and mutual aid networks for decades.

The ethos of our principles, offered in a 2016 reading list, is guided by the premise that we reject competitions between intersecting struggles. We believe that “progressive” alliances exemplified in “Green New Deal” and “democratic socialist” trajectories — as opposed to radical Red Deal actions — obscure more revolutionary trajectories and strategically undermine the mission of BIPOC liberation. We warned then, as we do now, of the dire consequences of band-aid (in)actions ingrained in the flawed logic and ploy that “voting reduces harm.”

We are among those who belong to, and take inspiration from Indigenous land defenders of the Wet’suwet’en nation and NoDAPL, who never caught, as Lower Brule Sioux Tribe historian Nick Estes puts it, “as much attention and support as the blond-haired Swedish teenager did just months earlier, when she made near-identical arguments about climate justice as her Indigenous counterparts.”

We are founders of intentional communities and queer-feminist abolition groups. We have been active in anti-globalization movements since Seattle 1999 and are inspired by movements such as *La Vía Campesina* and the Zapatistas that center a horizontalist — non-electoral — politics anchored in what scholar-activists like Richard JF Day refer to as “non-universalizing, non-hierarchical, non-coercive relationships” as well as “mutual aid and shared ethical commitments.”

We hold the radical teachings of anti-Americans like Malcolm X, anti-colonial and anti-imperialists like Martin Luther King, as well as Red and Black Power movements close to our hearts. We understand full-well that in fighting for global social justice, these revolutionaries never hungered, thirsted or coveted becoming professional career politicians. Instead, they chose to serve their people without reifying pre-existing hierarchies, being sensitively aware of how the hallways of state and institutional prestige, celebrity and material power risk corrupting even the best intentions for social change.

We are influenced by Indigenous and Black studies historians, like Nick Estes as well as Palestinian political scientists like Joseph Massad and Steven Salaita who have exposed the myth that Bernie is a “fighter” for Palestine despite being both pro-Zionist and pro-Imperialist.

## **The False Assumptions of the “Progressive” Left**

Sun Tzu wrote, if you fail to recognize the scope and nature of the enemy, “you will succumb in every battle.”

From its origins, the trajectory of voting and liberal, progressive, and even some leftist movements are based on several deeply flawed assumptions in this war on Black, Indigenous and People of color communities (BIPOC).

### **1. That the American Dream and Democracy Exist**

Need history remind us, the US was founded on the violent Euro-Christian crusading doctrine of Manifest Destiny and the Doctrine of Discovery. As Patrick Wolfe notes, 1492 is “not an event.” Rather, it established a structure with a religious character known as “conquistador settler-colonialism” as Tiffany Lethabo-King argues and many other Indigenous scholar-activists like Eve Tuck and Sandy Grande have noted.

What is conquistador settler-colonialism? First, it is premised on the “Original Sin,” on the ongoing genocide of Indigenous nations and peoples and on the theft of their lands, which form the wealth that Empire uses for plunder, pillaging and exploitation.

Once the assumed “Terra Nullius,” or empty land, was cleared of its purported “heathen savage” original inhabitants, conquistador settler-colonialism relied on plantation – slave – economies. Irrespective of 13<sup>th</sup> and Right to Vote amendments, this enslavement is enshrined to this day through what Saidiya Hartman refers to as “afterlife slavery.” Slavery is constantly (re)birthed through stand-your-ground laws, police brutality and premeditated extrajudicial killings, routine “stop and frisk” policies, “Broken Window Policing,” voter disenfranchisement, school-to-prison pipelines, impoverishment and premature deaths, as well as 1994 crime bills which Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders voted for and that superfluously target and incarcerate Black youth who are referred to as “super-predators” and “thugs” within a shattered criminal justice system.

Indigenous and Black feminist scholars like Tiffany Lethabo King, Zainab Amadahy, Bonita Lawrence, Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang, and numerous others have addressed how white conquistador settler-colonialism’s divide and conquer strategies pit Native against Native and Black against Black. They note how Black Cherokees in Oklahoma and Black Mi’kmaq peoples in Nova Scotia are a living embodiment of the intertwining of Indigenous and Black peoples’ fates and futurities.

Nowadays, much like the way Kimberlé Crenshaw’s intersectionality is toothlessly deployed by “woke” activists as an “add-on,” progressives ritually conduct empty land acknowledgments.

They pay lip service to the fact that they are on stolen land, without addressing the implications of this given their complicity in land theft and Indigenous demands for land's repatriation. Why? Because it is easier for settlers to trade on the questionable myth of a "secular American Dream" and its hyphenated-melting pot of identities — that are indignantly detached from land-based histories and practices and an immeasurable, continuing, violence against Indigenous and Black peoples defining its landscape.

An example of this is Ilhan Omar and Rashida Talib's hypocrisy when they acknowledge that America is founded on Indigenous genocide and yet, simultaneously hail themselves as products of the American Dream, erasing their complicity, despite being women of color, in the reification of settler-colonialism. Omar went so far as proclaiming the mother of neoliberalism, Margaret Thatcher, as an "inspiration" and war monger Madeleine Albright as an exemplary model refugee who made "enormous contributions" to America.

## **2. That the State Can be an Instrument of Social Justice**

The second mistake progressives commit because they learned little from the Egyptian "Arab Spring" Uprisings of 2011, is their assumption that in the struggle for social justice nation-states can be disentangled from capitalism. Historians like Fernand Braudel, May'68 scholars like Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as well as radical social movement activists have long argued that it is a historical fact that the European paradigms of capitalism and the nation-state evolved symbiotically. Although they can become disjointed over the short-term, creating ruptures with local and even regional implications, the relationship between capitalism and nation-states is rooted in their long-term mutual interests.

Neoliberalism is deeply anchored in the idea that the relationship between nation-states and (racial)capitalism is irreversible, and both are dependent on the dissemination of repressive anti-intersectional racializing, gendering, sexualizing, classist, debilitating and ableist logics that we have all internalized and replicate at the horizontal level. Capitalist states are not just administrative structures; they shape our understanding of the world, including our own identities and thoughts and fine-tune our behavioral patterns, feelings and emotions.

Nation-states are a central component of the problem because they are assumed to be a neutral entity that can be instrumentally mobilized as a tool to usher in revolutionary social-change. This ignores that they are founded upon structural inequities and enable subjects that reproduce the violent inequalities of institutions given that subjectivities are also formed, defined and regulated by these structures.

## **3. That Fascism is the Same as Totalitarianism**

When progressive movements claim that they fear Trump has ushered-in fascism, they are naively mistaking fascism for totalitarianism. Totalitarianism seeks to concentrate and crystallize power at the top of the state-pyramid in the hands of a single individual or political party to fully impose draconian order from above. This process takes place through force, be it via police repression, legislative and judicial power, or even national emergencies, imposed curfews and military regimes.

Fascism goes a step further. As well as concentrating state power, it promulgates itself at the horizontal levels of the family, neighborhoods, schools, factories and hospitals among others. Its

goal is to transform us all into egoistic little Mussolini's and mini-gods in our public and private behaviors. Fascism is facilitated through the dissemination of cultural and spiritual stereotypes that we all reenact.

What makes fascism more dangerous than totalitarianism is its insidiousness: fascism is mobilized on a molecular-mass and local scale that operates in all vectors and directions. Fascism is a cancer encoded within and reinforced by the capitalist-states. We express our internalized micro-fascisms through the symbolic and structural privileges that we each enjoy and reproduce in our social encounters.

As I have written elsewhere, struggling against fascism means struggling against our egomaniacal authoritarian and materialist selves. We have all been weaned on capitalist and state practices that have taught us how to covet power, to categorize and discipline others and ourselves. We have all been taught to commoditize, individualize, commercialize and materialize not only space and time, but also love, friendships, solidarity, allyship and land.

In order to reassert control over our own lives and achieve more egalitarian horizons, we must acknowledge the reality of conquistador settler-colonialism and the fact that we all participate in the replication of micro-fascistic oppressions that colonial "cultures of whiteness" produce and relentlessly disseminate through capitalist-state frameworks. We cannot eradicate power differentials in our daily encounters, but we can delineate them by combating our micro-fascisms and taking responsibility as individuals and communities to decolonize our hearts, spirits and actions.

We must acknowledge that representative democracy is not much of a democracy when its laden with racialized district remapping, voter dis-enfranchisement and suppression; partisan gerrymandering; dark money ads; electoral college systems that are often pegged against a popular vote; 2010 Citizen's United verdicts that give special interests groups unlimited spending; as well as bills like 501 4C, that permit designated "social welfare" organizations to engage in electoral politics in unregulated ways.

Instead, we ought vie for direct-lateral participatory democracy since power is inherently decentralized and everywhere. This requires that individuals and communities learn to live according to a self-determined politics of collective responsibility relative to ourselves and all (non)human life.

## **The Solution? Revolutionary Liberation, Not Reform**

Liberation struggles do not occur in a vacuum. They evolve in historical (neo)colonial contexts in which nations and their constituents have defined false and idealized myths of their pasts and themselves. While white supremacist ideologies and assumptions inform conservative right-wing parties and positions, the greater danger is how they disguise themselves within (neo)liberal progressive and even leftist positions. Some perceive Heineken and Johnnie Walker-sponsored pride parades and Women's Marches as resistance, despite the fact that these movements are often premised on bleached notions of non-violence, gay marriage, coming-out narratives, pride and shame.

What decolonization is and what it entails is a fiery politics of non-statist horizontalist action and responsibility, allyship and solidarity, animated by a genuine radical ethics of care. It is a subject complexly addressed by many elsewhere. It involves understanding how states and cap-

italism percolate into our everyday relations, and that, as Richard F. Day puts it in *Gramsci is Dead*, “we are not governed by ‘institutions’ apart from ourselves, by a ‘state’ set over against ‘civil society’ [but] rather we all govern each other via a complex web of capillary relations.”

The progressive hope of expanding the Squad by investing “positive energy [in]to existing structures and processes in the hope of their amelioration” only serves to re-entrench conquistador settler-colonialism and expands investments in settler-futurities. Instead, the decolonial goal ought be to reduce the efficacy and reach of state and capitalist structures “by withdrawing energy from them and rendering them redundant,” as Day writes.

Decolonization is also transnational and migrational. Meaning, it demands that we understand the entwined relationship between conquistador settler-colonial — US and Canada — and franchise colonial societies — like Egypt — that are symbolically, spiritually, historically and materially interrelated. Settler-colonialism, homonationalism, pinkwashing and cisheteropatriarchy in the US and Canada fuel imperialism and the upholding of military and religious dictatorships abroad.

This results in the subjugation of entire peoples in “post-colonial” nations. Conquistador settler-colonialism *can be*, if not in fact *is*, the circulatory agent of another colonialism. For example, settler-colonialism in the US and Canada upholds Zionist settler-colonialism in Palestine and Palestinian dispossession as Steven Salaita, Dana Olwan and many scholar-activists have argued.

Decolonization means recognizing that struggles from “Jerusalem to the Grand River are one.” That there is no freeing Palestine without freeing Indigenous and Black peoples in the heart of US Empire because all our fires are interconnected.

As an antidote, decolonization necessitates building non-statist, anti-authoritarian, land-based spiritual alternatives and being able to defend them tactically, with arms if need be. Decolonization means abolishing the punitive prison-judicial and imperialist-military industrial complexes and replacing them with transformative and not just restorative justice. Only the former addresses the underlying state structure of settler-colonialism that frames abolition and Indigenous sovereignty while the latter does not.

Decolonization demands a consistent spiritual and practice-based relationship with land, as well as attunement to harvesting and replenishment cycles, food-based sovereignty and security. It entails relearning how to walk the land, radical eco-psychological permaculture, bioregionalism, herb and horticultural techniques, towards cultivating more homeostatic equilibriums and regenerative agricultures without seeking a return to a romanticized bygone past.

Decolonization involves substituting multinational agrochemical and agricultural biotechnologic companies like Monsanto with harvesting practices that are mindful of land and replenishment cycles as an alternative to colonial perspectives based on civilizational domination and ecological devastation.

Decolonization is learning how to grow our own food, sharing and expanding access to land, withdrawing our dependency and reliance on capitalism, building sufficiency. Our medical and pharmaceutical complexes must be replaced with modern and traditional holistic healing practices.

Liberation means rematriating Indigenous land given hundreds of broken treaties. It implies conceiving non-statist and non-capitalist frameworks of Black reparations that neither denies Indigenous dispossession or subscribes to a capitalist insurance tabulate of dollar-cent figures

in the devalued redressing of human misery, shackling and death, which no price-tag can be assigned to. Nothing short of freedom for all BIPOC who are born orchestrated to die, suffices.



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