

Settler-Colonialism, Nationalism, and Patriarchy



by **Onyesonwu Chatoyer**

This booklet published by Red Machete 2022

Red Machete is a revolutionary communist organization in Portland, Oregon that seeks the destruction of capitalist white supremacy and settler colonialism. We believe very strongly this needs to be done through a militant feminist praxis.



www.redmachete.org

redmachete@protonmail.com

Settler-Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism

It is impossible to understand capitalism without first understanding settler-colonialism and neo-colonialism – the dominant forms of colonialism still remaining in the world today. The earth's most dangerous imperialist power – the United States of America – is itself a former British (but also in some regions such as the southwest and southeast, Spanish and French) settler colony turned independent settler state and its constellation of junior imperialist allies – which include Azania (South Africa), Canada, Australia, and the illegal state of Israel – are settler-colonies turned settler states as well. Every imperialist and junior imperialist European power – from France to Spain, to Belgium, to Portugal, to Germany, and most notably Britain – has held settler-colonies at one time or another.

Settler-colonialism is a structure in which European invaders wear down an indigenous population through wars of attrition, steal their lands through military conquest, and later settle in that stolen territory and establish European-controlled republics. The defining feature of settler-colonialism is the systematic dehumanization, subjugation, and dispossession of the indigenous population – whether African, Palestinian, Irish, Aboriginal, Pueblo, or Huichol – and the destruction and/or manipulation of indigenous identities, practices, and cultures to further those aims.

The ultimate goal of a settler-colonial project is to completely replace the indigenous population with the settler one – by any means necessary – so as to legitimize and continue in perpetuity the theft of land and resources. Notably, this process of theft, murder, oppression, and destruction is a cross-class project for the colonizing power – while the settler bourgeois directs and most benefits from the process, the settler petit-bourgeois and working-class act as the middle-managers and foot soldiers of what is ultimately an extended campaign of extermination. Through the expropriation of land, sharing of the super-profits generated by exploited labor, and participation in the industries which spring up to provide the economic, social, and

political infrastructure for dispossession, the settler petit-bourgeois and working-class materially benefit as well. This obviously presents a serious, but not insurmountable, problem for uniting on the basis of class with the settler working-class during revolutionary struggles in settler-states.

An important way that settler-colonialism (and later neo-colonialism) perpetuates itself is through the educational systems instituted post-conquest in settler-colonial projects. Through these institutions – including residential schools in Canada and the US and British public schools in Ghana and Zimbabwe – and also through the systematic criminalization of indigenous languages, religions, and cultural practices, imperialist powers are able to produce a segment of the colonized population that has been indoctrinated into the practices and values of the colonizer bourgeois. When the revolutionary struggle of an oppressed people forces the end of crude and settler-colonialism, this segment of the colonized population ultimately becomes the new managers under the system of neo-colonialism – the national pseudo-bourgeois and petit-bourgeois – willing black and brown figureheads for the capitalist-imperialist system.

It is important to understand colonialism in all forms – settler, neo, and crude – as a tactic of imperialist expansion and exploitation under capitalism, and to understand racism and white supremacy as the ideological justification for that expansion and exploitation. It wasn't the Curse of Ham that doomed those of us with darker skin, it was the institution of capitalism as the world's dominant economic system through colonialism and imperialism. Wherever colonial structures exist, you will find an oppressed population being systematically denied their humanity and identity in order to facilitate their dispossession. Africans on the continent and in the diaspora represent one such population, the Irish in Ireland another, the Pueblo people in New Mexico another, and Palestinians in occupied Palestine are yet another – but such populations exist in every corner of the world. Colonialism forms the backbone of the global imperialist system: the system by which the expropriation of land and resources and the exploitation of colonized labor provides the seed capital for monopoly

capitalism. Marx described this process as “primitive accumulation.” In practice, it is theft and genocide on a global scale.

There has never been a moment in history where an oppressed and exploited people voluntarily submitted to this dispossession and exploitation. Though most settler states include in their origin stories myths of voluntary indigenous submission, colonized populations have resisted European invasion since the moment the first invader set foot on their shores. In 1510 the Khoi Khoi of Azania successfully repelled an attempted Portuguese invasion of Africa – killing 65 would be conquerors armed with steel weapons. In 1680 the Pueblo nations of the southwest modern-day US organized one of the largest indigenous uprisings in the history of the Americas – driving off the Spanish for over a decade. There are hundreds of thousands of examples of organized resistance large and small throughout the entire history of colonialism and imperialism. With oppression comes resistance, always.

In colonies where enslaved Africans and other oppressed peoples were subjugated alongside indigenous peoples facing extermination, we also see throughout history a high level of multinational collaboration. One example of this is maroon colonies – settlements comprised of formerly enslaved Africans who had liberated themselves, indigenous peoples who had occupied the land for centuries, and at times a small number poor and working-class Europeans. Because of their level of organization, many of these formations were able to successfully repel imperialist attacks for years and in some cases – like in the Seminole territories of Florida and the quilombos of Brazil – for many decades. Maroon colonies in the Americas and the Caribbean represented sort of proto-contested zones – areas where Africans and indigenous peoples were able to develop and defend independent societies, but which were still usually heavily dependent on economic engagement with colonial centers in order to gain supplies like weapons and ammunition – a point of weakness.

There is a strong historical precedent for revolutionary solidarity

between Africans in the diaspora and indigenous peoples in the Western hemisphere which should be studied and applied to our strategies today. While alone neither people have the capacity or organization required to constitute a serious internal threat to US & Western imperialism, united – and moving in coordination with revolutionary struggles in Africa and throughout the global South – we could bring the beast to its knees. Such collaboration in the modern day would necessarily require first struggling against contradictions between our communities – chauvinism and mistrust created by colonialism and imperialism – but it is important to understand these contradictions as ultimately non-antagonistic. With a commitment to developing a shared analysis of our respective histories, cultures, and struggles through organized study and political work in formations such as the African & Native Solidarity Group (active in Portland, OR and Albuquerque, NM), COPINH (active in Honduras), and OPSAAL we can begin to build a strong foundation for principled unity. Building multi-national unity with other oppressed and colonized peoples would also provide us with the collective strength and organization needed to advance and decisively win revolutionary struggles in settler and neo-colonial states – in Africa and throughout the world – regardless of the current political position of the settler working class which has historically aligned with capitalism, imperialism, and fascism. If we're good together we can be good without them if needed.

The maroon colony model should also be systematically studied, updated, and applied in the present day. We now have the technical capacity to overcome the economic dependence which characterized these formations in their earlier forms and we should pursue a strategy of creating contested and liberated zones throughout the diaspora in areas like the south and southwest US and the Caribbean coast of Honduras where colonized people represent the majority of the population and where internal points of weakness in and important infrastructure for the imperialist system exists – just as we should on the continent. These contested zones under multinational political control could represent base areas out of which we could coordinate and wage escalating revolutionary struggles.

Nationalism and National Identity

As the process of colonization intensified, subjugated populations responded with higher and higher levels of organized resistance. It was during this time in both the Western hemisphere and throughout the continent of Africa that we begin to see revolutionary nationalism – and revolutionary national identities – in their earliest forms emerge. Nationalism is the ideological foundation of a national liberation struggle – that is the struggle of a colonized people to liberate themselves – and a national identity in the simplest terms is a “body of people who consider themselves a new nation,” unified by a common struggle and a common destiny.

The existence of a common enemy prompted populations facing enslavement and annihilation to develop a common identity that was deeply rooted in the aspects of their cultures that gave them strength and a sense of their own independent history and destiny. These national identities were revolutionary because they formed a philosophical foundation for organized resistance which intended to overthrow the imposed colonial order. These identities in many cases also unified populations who previously had considered their differences intractable.

It is important to note that nationalism itself isn't inherently revolutionary nor should it be considered an endpoint for struggle. Because it acts as a means of uniting a colonized people across stratas on the basis of their subjugation by imperialism, it also has the pitfall (quoting Fanon) of obscuring internal contradictions, most notably class but also importantly gender. Time after time, as national liberation struggles were won at one stage in Africa, we saw the cross-strata unity dissolve and internal contradictions come to the fore. National bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie who had united with the masses of poor and working-class Africans in the name of anti-colonialism stepped into positions which enabled them to benefit from and facilitate the exploitation of their own people as neo-colonialism emerged. This history repeats itself not just in Africa, but

all over the colonized world and displays a clear need for us to redefine national identity and revolutionary nationalism in the age of neo-colonialism. Luckily, Pan-Africanist revolutionaries like Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, and Sekou Toure have provided us with a clear ideological basis for this redefinition, rooted in their experience with a developing neo-colonialism.

Let's look at Cabral's definition of national liberation: "the people's control of the forces of production: land, labor, and resources" alongside Sekou Toure's conception of the People, given in *Strategies and Tactics of the Revolution*:

"Individuals or groups of individuals having interests that are opposed to the outlook of historical evolution are excluded from the class of the People although they are still Guineans. Thus, in the philosophical sense of the PDG, it is not all Guineans citizens that constitute the People whose virtues and qualities are praiseworthy and who are considered the decisive force which has to decide everything, guide everything, and control everything. Here it is simply a matter of the laborious masses only, those which are toiling, those which are aspiring for full justice, democracy, true solidarity, and which are only striving to full liberate themselves from all forces of exploitation and oppression, whereas the strata of individuals favourable to exploitation would be automatically excluded from the class of the People with the view to constituting an anti-People's class. And those who find themselves outside the People can only be the target of revolutionary action which aims either at forcing them to an inevitable, necessary, decisive, complete reconversion or annihilating them in order to pave the way of freedom to the advancement of the true laborious People."

This definition of 'the people' would notably exclude the African bourgeois and petit-bourgeois aligned with capitalism and imperialism. Using this conception of who actually comprises the "masses of African people" means that if your success comes at the expense of the people, you are not of the people. You are, in fact, anti-people. This definition of African identity would exclude class

enemies like the Obamas and the Carter-Knowles of the world, people who are African by blood but not by action or political alignment. It's important to note that Toure doesn't frame this as a permanent exclusion – the struggle of the masses of African people forces the Obamas of the world to pick a side – the people or capitalism-colonialism-imperialism. If they choose the people, they win with the people, if they choose the enemy, they fall with the enemy.

Neo-colonialism forces us to redefine who we are and who our people are. We should develop a conception of African identity that is rooted in the experiences, culture, and primacy of the masses of poor, peasant, and working-class Africans.

Patriarchy and National Liberation

In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney describes in agonizing detail how European invaders were able to exploit existing contradictions in order to turn indigenous African nations against each other and gain a foothold on the continent in the midst of the chaos this created. In pre-colonial times those contradictions were largely tied to class position, hierarchy, patriarchy, and property ownership, in the modern-day they have expanded to also include gender contradictions exacerbated by colonialism, color hierarchies in settler states, ableism produced by capitalist relations, and many more. We must understand victory in the struggle against internal contradictions as a necessary prerequisite for national liberation. Each time we allow liberalism and chauvinism to influence how we conceive of and treat our people, we create a point of weakness that can be exploited by imperialism.

This means that our conception of who is African and who is 'the people' can not include any caveat excluding or marginalizing any poor or working-class African person on the basis of gender identity, sexuality, color, ability, or any other identity marker. In practice this means not just rhetorically upholding the liberation of African women

and non-men as primary within the struggle for African liberation but also creating movements and organizations where we are not preyed upon, disregarded, or marginalized. This means strictly adhering to number 10 of Nkrumah's rules of discipline given in the Handbook "Do not take liberties with women" – with serious consequences when we fall short – but it also means taking up the struggle against patriarchy in a systematic and organized way – WITH STUDY – so that women and non-men are no longer viewed as sexual or lesser objects within the formations we commit our lives to.

Further, we have an analysis within the AAPRP which on the one hand recognizes that colonialism and capitalism imposed European constructions of gender-based on biology, divided labor into reproductive and productive modes, and used that as a basis to dispossess and oppress African women and non-men but which on the other, upholds uncritically the very binary biology-based gender roles created by that process of conquest and exploitation.

Our acceptance of the biology-based binary gender roles created by Europeans imperialists in service of capitalism and colonialism for the explicit purpose of subjugating African women and non-men is thus a contradiction. If we understand that these constructions of gender were imposed by European colonialism and a developing global capitalism, using them as the basis for our line on how to liberate women and non-men from these systems makes no sense. There is, indeed, a hard limit to how far our analysis and interventions around these questions can go if we are using such a poor foundation as our starting point for thinking about them. We have a revolutionary responsibility to further develop our line on gender and reject the binary and roles enforced by colonialism.

This all necessarily means developing autonomous political organizations that exist for the express purpose of building the revolutionary consciousness and independent political power of women, non-men, and queer folks – like the All African Women's Revolutionary Union. It is my experience that the systematic struggle

against patriarchy and gender contradictions called for in the previous paragraphs straight up will not happen if women and non-men and queer folks do not have an organized and independent political force that is present and pushing that process forward.

Conclusion

The only way to destroy settler-colonialism – as a system and as a structure – is to return the land and resources stolen to the indigenous population. Many European-dominated (and some African) socialist parties aim to institute ‘progressive’ socialist governments post-revolution in settler states while sidestepping the question of decolonization. These state formations would continue the dispossession and colonization of indigenous peoples – no matter their politics or intent – and such can not be considered progressive. Decolonization and the ultimate destruction of imperialism requires the return of land and sovereignty to indigenous peoples – land was taken, land must be returned. We must assert as primary the right of all indigenous and colonized peoples to self-determination based on their own histories and cultures and that right should form the ideological foundation of our unity. Anything less is colonizer half-stepping.

The only way to destroy neo-colonialism is an internal class struggle within the colonized population which takes power from the indigenous bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie and places it in the hands of the organized masses of poor and working-class colonized people. It is essential to struggle against and ultimately destroy internal class contradictions as they represent – alongside gender contradictions produced by patriarchy and colour hierarchies produced by colonialism – a point of weakness in colonized populations that can be exploited by imperialist powers seeking to divide and subjugate us. The initial invasion of Africa and the nations of the Western hemisphere would not have been possible without these exploitable internal contradictions. The project of decolonization and ultimately national liberation necessarily requires overcoming them.

References

Class Struggle in Africa – Kwame Nkrumah
Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare – Kwame Nkrumah
Strategies and Tactics of Revolution – Sekou Toure
The Pitfalls of National Consciousness, from The Wretched of the Earth – Frantz Fanon
Resistance and Decolonization – Amilcar Cabral
How Europe Underdeveloped Africa – Walter Rodney
Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas – Richard Price
Women, Race, and Class – Angela Davis
Night Vision – Butch Leels
Apartheid Really Dead? Pan Africanist Working Class Cultural
Critical Perspectives – Julian Kunnie

Onyesonwu Chatoyer is an African woman marooned in the United States, organizing to defeat capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. She is an organizer with the All-African People's Revolutionary Party and the All-African Women's Revolutionary Union, an editor with Hood Communist, and also serves on the national committee of the Venceremos Brigade.



www.redmachete.org
redmachete@protonmail.com
