

Why rise against colonization: its past, present and future?

Why, specifically as heirs of the "upper" castes of the racial system, globally and in the US?

Originally drafted in 2022; revised 2026.

This is both a personal and political response to that question. It's primarily intended to help light-skinned folk of European descent clarify our hearts and minds, and motivations. But also, for some Indigenous and people of color, it may be a resource for ongoing assessment of whether and how to be in cahoots with people like me.

It's a complicated thing to write. A big part of all this isn't really about words at all. It's a roar in my belly, a shivering clarity in various moments of my life that has changed how I experience and understand and practice the times in between.

Words come to me to help me understand this, partially; and maybe they can be useful to others. But they aren't the roar, they aren't the belly! Still, here we go.

Years ago, I was in a community-squatted school that was being used by the Anti-Eviction Campaign to train in directly returning people to their homes. It had been months of intense activity, traveling amongst informal settlements and movement spaces, living both the bitterness of a "revolutionary" liberation in Azania largely sold out by a new elite, and the fire of a people learning to rise again, just a decade or so later, in new ways.

During my time working with and between communities there, I learned much more of the bile-filled tastes and textures of colonial power. How it runs so palpably through skin color, yes; and accent, and forms of education, and imagination, and money, and frameworks of meaning. And, in contrast, I learned the rich other tastes of liberation: the creativity and also the memory, of lifeways that are before and beyond, as well as fiercely against "the white man's world".

Participating, even in a partial way, on the frontlines of grinding struggle between these life forms, I felt the bitterness and rage against the Empire grow in my belly. I felt my affinity and identification with so many familiar images and patterns melting, and a new allegiance growing.

In that squatted school I told Mustafa of this change. I bellowed a bit of my anger. I shyly shared a bit of my newfound commitment, and the question growing in me of what to do now. Should I leave the US, defect to the struggle in Azania?

He told me: No. Don't move away. Yes, defect: but defect there, and take as many of those white "umlungus" with you, as you can. We need the heart of empire to eat itself alive, he told me.

This is a learning I received again, in different ways, over and over: from Zapatistas in Chiapas, from Black nationalists in New Orleans, from Pan-Africanists in Portland, and Indigenous elders tending ceremonies on the land where I live. It is the beating heart of what follows: the journey launched by the bitterness and rage, and schooling, in that Anti-Eviction squat, so many years ago.

There are lots of reasons to fight the empire, to rise against racism.

At some level, all of them can be good reasons, insofar as they move us to action. Some actions may be more useful than others; but getting off our asses is a good start.

So here's a review of some reasons to be anti-racist – reasons that I do *not* focus on in this piece:

* **Guilt.** I think guilt can be an appropriate reaction to realizing the depth of the horror. Sure, it usually makes things too much about us, and we get unreliable: shutting down or turning away at bad moments. So let's use guilt as a signal, and go much deeper.

* **Interlocking systems of oppression.** In some versions of this model, there's a suite of structures (cisheteropatriarchy, classism, racism, etc.) that map onto people who have specific identities (some more and some less fixed). This leads to a moral and/or political understanding that we should follow the leadership of those more oppressed. There's a lot to this, with rich analysis, and it can really help us get beyond single-track thinking.

* **My liberation is bound up with yours.** This is a sense that all our oppressions are related -- because a single system is our enemy, or because the impacts of oppression are similar -- and that we need each other. It can be very powerful in a visceral way.

* **Anti-racist anti-capitalism.** A political-economic understanding that the engine of empire is capitalism, and that capitalism has historically, and remains currently, deeply dependent on racial oppression. Slavery and the Atlantic slave trade, land theft from Indigenous peoples, and the splitting of the working class, turning one part against the other.

* **Having Black/brown friends,** and showing up strong for them! This can sometimes be the most enduring and reliable motivation, depending on the character of our relations.

* **Adoption.** Being formally or informally recognized as an adopted member of Indigenous or decolonizing Black/brown spaces, so that one's life-orientation shifts to being fundamentally part of a different people. (Or aiming towards this outcome.)

* **Being woke and virtue signaling.** These are not the best reasons, but hey - whatever it takes to get things started!

All of these are connected and related, of course. All of them are ways of seeing and understanding the systems of white supremacy, and our calling to undo them, to smash them, to become something else. Thank you!

I've had my times when all of these motivations have run through me. They are not mutually exclusive. And what I'm describing here is a bit different.

Some words to describe the core motivation that arose years ago in me, in response to living amidst an intense anti-colonial struggle, and that I've (with guidance) slowly refined since then, are these:

This is the crux time, in which the Empire¹ will die. How much of the rest of life will it take with it? That's up to "us"; that is, not individual humans, nor a mass, but an ecosystem of non-imperial social beings, lifeways, peoples. Ways of being human as not-Empire, against and beyond it. Indigenous and decolonizing peoples have been and will be leading the way, because they are older and stronger in crafting not-Empire. But also, a great deal hinges on how many of the fully-colonized humans, those who are "white" or "postracial" or "assimilated" etc., can form from subcultures into peoples that can be in dignified, militant, and dependable cahoots.

This approach is at its heart about the conflict between what reproduces Empire, versus what is not only "against" it², but "beyond" it. Not exactly "outside" it³, but rather its death, and the life that amplifies and accelerates that death.

So, as people who have been assimilated into Empire's caste system as "white"⁴ -- when we betray that upbringing, and experience ourselves as part of lifeways against and beyond Empire, then anti-colonialism becomes directly in our own interests. Not for general or vague reasons, and certainly not out of altruism, but because the ecosystem of Empire-death lifeways is our own home.

This approach shares aspects with many of the list of other motivations above. And as antiracists we will do many of the same specific things, regardless of motivation. But I think there are tangible differences as well, that have bigger picture implications.

Some of these tangible implications:

* **Questioning assimilation.** Forms of politics that encourage colonized people to prioritize getting "more of the pie" by participating in the system (such as focusing on voting, civil rights through the law, integrated schools, Black/brown corporate and government elites, etc.) seem quite ambivalent, from this perspective.

Not just because such approaches are "reformist" and don't want to change the system enough -- but because it assumes the system as the only or primary form of power.

This doesn't mean we're necessarily *against* voting, or civil rights, etc. -- they can absolutely be useful tools in specific contexts. But there are down sides, especially when they become the limit of our imagination.

* **What is real diversity?** "Diversity", such as in the form of DEI, is often a form of assimilation. If the focus is on bringing Black/brown people into the framework of the empire (including activist or political parts of the "pressure relief valves" of the system), then it is implicitly getting different kinds

1 "Empire" as the world-eating mega-lifeway with a specific history rooted in Rome and Europe, that has engineered whiteness and race with the engine of capitalism for 500 years.

2 "Against" in this sense can still be contained within the Empire, like the "antithesis" of some revolutionary traditions; for many the horizon is not the death of Empire, but making it more fair, changing who controls what within it.

3 Being "outside" is nearly impossible now, because the Empire's gobbling of the world means that we live in a fractal space, in which Empire and not-Empire coexist almost everywhere, at every scale.

4 Or, in a way I think is related-but-not-the-same, as "elite", as "owners" or "ruling class", especially of neo-colonial spaces. There is a larger story here of the relations between race and class and caste, for another time.

of people to become more like each other, to identify with each other on the terrain of Empire. Even if our actions force the Empire into reforms and changes, if the core of what we're doing is still reproducing empire – then it's dangerous.

So what is real diversity? It's an ecosystem of profoundly different ways of being people, increasingly autonomous of Empire, in horizontal relations of dignity and respect with each other, willing and able to join together to fight the white man's world (or in spaces we've liberated, to undo any re-emergence).

* **Real diversity exists!** There are deep histories of just this sort of politics, among Indigenous, Pan-Africanist, Palestinian, Kurdish, and other "national liberation" movements that prioritize the fight against colonialism and colonial structures, rooted in ancestral memories and practices from before colonization. (At the same time, these of course are all complex and have specific strengths and challenges in their contexts. There is no purity or utopianism here, just the ongoing walking of the way, asking questions.)

* **Nationalisms aren't for everyone.** National liberation movements can be co-opted (neo-colonialism), especially when a movement becomes the government of a state. The language and imagery of cultural difference can become a screen for suppressing resistance and maintaining power on the terms of the Empire.

Moreover, many forms of nationalism become a mirror-image of white supremacy, casting a fixed image of the past (often inflected with patriarchy and "big-man" power) as the goal. They become fundamentalist, conservative.

So lots of people aren't part of these existing movements drawing from "before-Empire", and they can't really be, not in an honest way. This includes white people of course, for whom fundamentalist nationalism is basically a doorway to fascism. But it also includes those disaffected by the actual conservatism of a lifeway they were born into (which was often amplified and distorted by colonial history); or those that have been more fully assimilated generationally, and so need (or happen to find) another way out.

* **New forms of life.** Thus, even from the inside of Empire, we see a constant flowering of new social forms. These may be spiritualities, missioned across borders into new life (Dzogchen or Zen Buddhism, Hare Krishna, evangelical Christianity) or newly emerged (Rudolf Steiner, Moonies, Neopagans). They are often syncretisms, like Santeria or Vodoun or Candomble or the New Prophetic Churches in Africa or Rastafarianism or so many others. They tend to begin as subcultures, like hippies or punks, biker gangs or vogue dancers, maybe like Cossacks or Travellers.

Nothing about this makes them inherently revolutionary. They are at least as often tools of Empire, as anything else – like the rest of us. But humans are always bursting with creativity, becoming new kinds of peoples.

* **Death to Empire.** So a question becomes: to what extent can we, out of these ever-emerging forms, grow new social bodies that are anathema and poison to Empire, while also becoming dignified and coherent enough to enter into mutual relations with the existing ecosystem of decolonizing peoples?

This will take learning to see these new social bodies, often chock-full of ignorant white folk, as worth connecting with and tending, helping them grow in dignity and courage. All while disrupting the

potential they have to betray us, and breathing strength into the parts of them that stick in the maw of Empire, that may one day soon help choke it forever.

* **Who and how.** This is difficult, potentially triggering work. Especially for those who have another available path, such as a relatively-intact decolonizing community that they are part of or can join, they may choose to focus elsewhere. This will include many or most Black and brown folks, who will spend their attention on their own communities and the ecosystems that support them. From the perspective I'm sketching here, there's no call to change that! Instead, we can work on developing relatively skilled and experienced antiracists who can be liaisons with those communities. They can help these "new forms of life" provide material support without causing too many microaggressions and fuckups -- when that depth of connection is desired by the revolutionary ecosystem. And other times, we can simply cultivate support from afar.

* **In cahoots.** But we also need to practice ways of being more deeply in the ecosystem of Death to Empire. This can look like physical or organizational spaces in which folks in the "revolutionary decolonizing ecosystem" are also working on behalf of, and with support of, evolving crews of mostly white and/or assimilated people that are growing in understanding their "new lifeways", learning to be ancestors of earth people on their own terms, and using that as their foundation for being in cahoots with others.

To work and grow, such crews must be attractive spaces -- hard, yes; challenging, uncomfortable; but also affirming, exciting, and productive. There will need to be space made for people to fuck up, and change, in a context affirming the value in what we're doing. So we will work towards minimizing our negative impact on the Black/brown people we're in partnership with; but also it'll be helpful to have respected partners advocating for the value in a crew of white and/or assimilated people trying to unsettle and become earth people, at all.

* **Is this a cop out?** Could people use this approach as a way to excuse white folk who are self-indulging in our own good feelings, not taking responsibility for our impacts, and justifying it with revolutionary language? Yes. Of course it could, like just about any anti-racist ideology.

One way we can work to minimize that will be to have respected councils of people, mostly or entirely Indigenous and Black/brown people, who will be able to guide and assess the process, and offer feedback to all involved. Hard words, as needed; tough love, always.

But I think, in order to give ourselves a fighting chance, that feedback will ultimately also cultivate a sense that our participation in the ecosystem as a whole, and the lifeways that comprise it, is worth tending and celebrating.

Warriors of the earth, arise!

This is how I've attempted to engage with Cedar Moon, BWA and then SLA, and the elders council. It's how I've understood what's trying to be born through us; and how I've tried to play my personal role.

I welcome your feedback and suggestions!