Black Feminist Anarchism & Leftist Neglect of the African Continent

Zoé Samudzi

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This week we're excited to bring you a conversation with Zoe Samudzi.

Zoé is a freelance writer and doctoral student at the University of California, San Francisco. Her work is broadly around different aspects of race and coloniality, specifically through a black feminist lens.

We had an opportunity to talk with Zoé about Black Feminist Anarchism.

We also talked more broadly about how the necessity for US leftists to develop fuller understandings of the continent of Africa and its current conditions.

Zoé talked about how her mother's memory of Rhodesian colonialism has informed her anti-fascism.

And she suggests that if the US is to unify around anything meaningful it will be on the ground meeting the material needs of marginalized communities, not developing a post-revolutionary theory upon which we're all going to agree.

Zoé is a co-author of the forthcoming book As Black As Resistance on AK Press.

This is the second transcript we've published in our attempt to transcribe all of our episodes to increase the accessibility of our podcast. All of our transcribers have volunteered to do this, and we would like to thank @pauisanoun on twitter for transcribing this. The original audio version can be found https://www.patreon.com/posts/episode-2-black-15022605

Jared: Welcome to "Millenials Are Killing Capitalism". This is Jay, Josh will be joining the episode in a minute once we jump into the interview. This week, we're excited to bring you a conversation with Zoé Samudzi. Zoé is a freelance writer and a doctoral student at the University of California, San Francisco. Her work is broadly around different aspects of race and coloniality, specifically through a Black Feminist Lens. We had an opportunity to talk with Zoé about Black Feminism, the complex relationship she sees between the standard, anti-imperialist binary, and the experiences she and her family have had on the continent of Africa and, specifically, in Zimbabwe. We also talk more broadly about the necessity for U.S. leftists to develop fuller understandings of the continent of Africa and its current conditions, which differ broadly across the 54 countries on the continent. Zoé talked about her mother's memory about Rhodesian colonialism and how that has informed her anti-fascism. Finally, Zoé suggests that if the U.S. leftists unify around anything meaningful, it will be on the ground meeting the material needs of marginalized

communities, not developing a post-revolutionary theory that we are all going to agree to. We hope you enjoy our conversation.

Josh: So, Zoé, we know the political systems in Africa have not always existed through forms of bureaucratic rule. There were and are plenty of African peoples who found it possible to do without any regular apparatus of government. African communities were able to live peacefully together, to defend themselves, enlarge their wealth with very little help of central authority. We watched your speech on Black Feminist Anarchism — talk to us more about anarchistic elements in many traditional people in African societies.

Zoé: Yeah, in a lot of parts of the continent, people lived in communal systems where labor was divided, social roles were allocated in these kind of particular ways but goals were collectivized, justice was a kind of collective endeavor. That's obviously not to historicize and pretend that there were no highly centralized communities and structures. There were kingdoms across the continent, where power was extremely centralized and where systems were extremely hierarchical, so I think there was a combination of these two things.

Josh: Absolutely, and also on that speech, I loved the emphasis you put on, in a lot of these structures and practices, from Black and brown organizers — organizations, I should say — rather than simply reading theory from cis, white dudes — and, by the way, I wholeheartedly agree with that sentiment — would you recommend that approach to understanding anarchism to anyone that's new to the theory?

Zoé: You know, my entry to anarchism was through theory and a lot of comrades I know, you know, we go to school with nazis and nazis are beating people up.

Josh:: Absolutely.

Zoé: So we're gonna go beat up nazis. And so, I think, something that's been really beneficial to me has been to have conversations with people whose entrance into anarchism was through praxis, was through mutual aid, was through feeding communities, was through community defense. I think there's a lot that happens in certain kinds of praxis that isn't in a lot of the theory. Emotional labor, for example, and kind of supporting parents and having these new understandings of raising kids — that's something that Bakunin doesn't talk about. That's something that a lot of the theory doesn't talk about. A lot of anarchist theory doesn't talk about race until Black anarchists started getting shine and attention. I would very much recommend that the orientation is through praxis, is through looking at the ways that communities have organized the resistance to the state, have provided resources to themselves outside of the state, and kind of supplement that understanding with good theory from Black folks, anarcho-feminists, from disabled folks, from queer anarchists, from queer and trans anarchists.

Josh: Absolutely, I always think of Anarchism as the more hands-on, mutual aid type of approach to a massive racial movement, by the way. I think people think of it as more of a theoretical foundation, like Marxism or whatever, but your point about looking at Black and Brown organizations and how they practice it as a much better approach than just simply reading theory. But I think for anarchism, in general, that's a much better approach because of how it operates in the things that it — I don't know how to really explain it. Just the way that we understand anarchism it feels more as a hands-on approach which is why I don't really mind the on-the-ground anarchism or even anti-fascists being majority white. I don't mind the idea of those on-the-ground who are putting their bodies on the lines for oppressed peoples. What about you? Do you think that's an issue for anti-fascist groups being the ones facing off to fascists and the State, you

know? Is that a problem for you? Do you wish it was more inclusive of other races, and non-cis, non-white people, I should say.

Zoé: I mean, me, personally, I'm not trying to have the shit beat out of me. So, if there's a bunch of burly white dudes who wanna go fight the police? Go ahead. At the same time, I don't wanna pretend that anarchism does not also have a tendency to be extremely theoretical, because I don't think that there's anything that's more theoretical than completely trying to transform our relationship to the state. I think that there are ways that are incredibly concrete, like when we attempt, like, kind of community justice, right? When there's some dude who does something nonsense and instead of calling the cops y'all go face off, beat the shit out of dude — like, you know, that's a thing.

But at the same time, even the Black Feminist Anarchism that I'm proposing — it's like what does it mean to create community that is safe for Black women, for Black trans women? That's an incredibly theoretical exercise because that requires that we have all of these conversations and start to create material politics around misogynoir and trans misogynoir, around disability, around the relationships that men have with one another and the ways that they demand and hold one another accountable, which, when we're seeing all this shit blow up with Harvey Weinstein, we have all these men in Hollywood that were like, "I knew and I should've done more, and I vow to do more," and I think that's an attitude that a lot of men take with a lot of things that have to do with gender and gendered violence.

Understanding societal organization outside of the state, which is a thing that I come into tension sometimes with state Communists, to push people a little bit to say, okay, well sometimes in the transition from a capitalist to a socialist — we've never had a communist state — what has been the issue with re-education, right? Because it's the re-education process within socialism is the reason that we've never been able to get to a communist state. What are maybe the problems in attempting to shift the consciousness of everyone living within the state, as opposed to trying to form these autonomous, non-hierarchical organizations and social systems and social structures? Yeah, let me not pretend that anarchism is not incredibly theoretical because all of these left exercises in world building and world creation, no matter what tendency they fall into, are incredibly theoretical.

Josh: Absolutely. So do you not think that we can build socialism post-capitalism? I always take the much more traditional Marxist approach, where the downfall for capitalism is inevitable to me, either capitalism is going to end, or we're not going to exist. Humanity will not further exist on this on this planet, I should say. So I don't see a world where we could strictly go from capitalism, knowing the violent means that comes with it, to communism. Do you not see that possibility of having a minor or little to no state before transitioning to anarchism? I mean because I think there needs to be a stage where we are relearning and unlearning what we've been taught under capitalism, and trying to transform our world into a much more safe place for Black trans women, for queer people, for anyone not cis and white, I should say.

Zoé: I don't see Anarchism as being part of that Marxist trajectory of state transformation, for starters.

Josh: Ok.

Zoé: I don't see anarchism as being part of evolution out capitalism, necessarily. Like, when I look at the Zapatistas and they were, you know, in conflict with the Mexican state, eventually they stopped trying to kind of be the state or to take over the state apparatus and they constructed their own autonomous community structure and community system. If we're looking at this Marxist

trajectory out of capitalism, though, I would assume that this, you know, this dictatorship of the proletariat, this socialist stage is necessary because you have to get people disinvested from these capitalist understandings of organization and into a communist one.

Josh: Absolutely.

Zoé: But the thing that I've had a lot of conversations with state communists about is that communism is ultimately a stateless society and so, regardless of how much you hate anarchism, Marx did not believe in nationalism. We just read the Communist Manifesto in my Sociology class and from what I'm reading, he kind of understood this communist revolution as being this borderless, global, internationalized proletariat solidarity movement, and that necessarily has to happen outside of the confines of what we understand as nation-states.

But the way that I understand organizing and the way that I understand the urgency of this moment, I don't think that we are in any position to start to plan post-revolution. I think that it's really critical and urgent that we start trying to construct extra state community structures because we don't have time to hope that everyone is going to be on board for when the revolution starts because everyone, at this pace, at the pace that capitalism is killing people, if we wait until the perfect conditions to start the revolution, everybody's gonna be dead.

So, how do we develop this harm reduction strategy of keeping people safe, providing people access to resources, of providing mutual aid to people? In anticipation of something, in preparation to something I don't think that these kinds of anarchist organization is antithetical at all to what everybody else is doing because I think that everybody else should be providing mutual aid, everybody should be supporting community in material ways.

Josh: It's the issue of both sides to be focused on theoretical approaches rather than actual, on-the-ground approaches to allow the material, if that makes sense. We're kind of so focused on what Marx says or what Lenin says without realizing that there's communities and bodies in need now and who are dying in the hands of the state or in the hands of capitalism, in general.

Moving on. We know that the deliberate erasure of Black leftists as simply communists is an act of liberal white supremacy. How do we go about decolonizing what we most know as anarchism, and really where can we highlight the fact that Black people have been engaged in anarchistic resistances since colonization, I guess the almost whitewashing of what so many, including leftists think of anarchism.

Zoé: The first thing is understanding how capitalism works. I think there's a tendency for a lot of leftists to have a really incomplete understanding of what capitalism actually is. If we're not describing Capitalism the way that Cedric Robinson was describing it in terms of being racial Capitalism, in terms of understanding the contours of capitalism being shaped by, at least in the United States or globally through colonialism, through the genocide of indigenous communities and the expropriation of their land and resources, through slavery and — in the United States — the afterlife of slavery, if we're not understanding specifically the ways in which economic violence is inextricably linked to racialized violence and commodification of non-white bodies, then we actually have no understanding of how capitalism works.

And I think, for starters, go learn how capitalism works, and, also, don't think of resistance to colonial violence as necessarily being inspired by Marxism, because the Haitian Revolution happened how many years before Marx was born? People of color across the world have been resisting white supremacy, have been resisting capitalism prior to Karl Marx synthesizing history the way that he did and applied a set of theory to the particular kind of resistances that people had, or, prior to anarchism, describing social organizations in a particular way and historicizing

the ways in which people were living and existing. I mean, non-white folks have been existing in kind of organized societal structures longer than nation-states have been a thing. I think people need to not buy into this white supremacist and really Eurocentric understanding of human development, of social development that does revolve around participation in nation-states.

Josh: I think that is actually the thing because everything has kind of been whitewashed in a way, where we kind of forget about the ways in which Black people have, and also non-Black people of color, have resisted white supremacy and colonialism in the diaspora. But with that being said, do you think that Black Anarchism is the way forward toward liberation? I know you're not trying to plan what's to come next, obviously, but…

Zoé: I think that Black folks — I mean, William [C. Anderson] and I wrote in our essay, "The Anarchism of Blackness," — I think Black folks gotta have an understanding that the state is only going to do so much for us, because the state was only designed to do so much for us. Where race in America most visibly revolves around anti-blackness, I won't say in its totality because race in America also revolves around the genocide and invisibilization of indigenous, people, but most visibly race revolves around anti-blackness the American state revolves around anti-blackness because the American white nationalist state can only produce anti-blackness.

We celebrate these kind of legislative gains that we've made, these reforms, that have been made in our favor. But when you make a reform, you've got a fundamentally unchanged system, you are at the mercy, of whoever is going to be interpreting the laws, and as we're seeing, with 45, we have Jeff Sessions, who is a horrible, maniacal white nationalist. He is going to prove to be one of the worst things for Black civil rights that we have seen in recent administrations, and I don't think that it's the best idea for us to put the future of our safety of our communities into the hands of the Democratic party, into the hands of the American state, because the Democrats count on us as being one of the most consistent voting blocs of any demographic, and yet because they know that we don't have a "choice," they don't actually have to offer anything in exchange for community loyalty. I'm not necessarily saying everybody needs to go be an Anarchist, but I'm also saying I do believe in harm reduction, I do believe in voting as a tactic for harm reduction but I don't believe in voting as an end-all be-all political strategy and I think it's incredibly dangerous to do that.

Josh: Yeah, I think there's gonna be two ways that this goes post-45, as well, where people are going to see as harmful as he is and just use the Democratic. That's why [the Democrats are] doing so little is because they know that people are going to vote for them when it comes to 2020 because the other option is that horrible. So I think that there's gonna be two ways in which this goes where people will rise up and actually do something about the status quo, or they're going to remain stagnant and just choose the lesser harm option, which is the Democratic party, obviously, which is why I think the rise of 45 was a — it could be a really good thing for marginalized people ten years down the line or in 20 years down the line, but at the moment, it feels really divided in the way that we will approach it when it comes to 2020 or when [2018 elections come] it comes time to limit the harm that is done to marginalized communities, which is why I try to emphasize the fact that we shouldn't center our "resistance" around 45, but rather white supremacy as a whole you know, and continue to vote for the Democratic party, the continuance of white supremacy, global white supremacy, I should say.

Zoé: When it comes to voting, we're also seeing these voter disenfranchisement laws, and you've seen that these laws are unconstitutional because of the ways that they overwhelmingly are racialized, and so if we're relying on our votes to be our participation in the system, but

Black and Brown people and poor people are being increasingly prevented from being able to vote, what is now our access to participation? It's a really dangerous position to be caught in, if we're not prepared for voting to be a strategy and to have other strategies within our arsenal for liberation and for community protection.

Josh: So do you think there is a reason, a deliberate reason, why there are so few Black and non-black people of color who are anarchists? I just think anarchists don't provide means for reaching out to people of color and bring them over. Obviously, there are Black and Brown anarchists, but I feel like there's something to be said about how so many Black and Brown people feel like they're rather excluded from current anarchist movements.

Zoé: I feel like it's part of this historical way that leftism has been branded. When we hear about anarchists, a lot of Black folks talk about these outside agitators, but when you look at the language around outside agitation, that was the language that these white, southern lawmakers and politicians would use to prevent Black communities from doing work with white, communist organizers or anti-racist organizers. It's a language that specifically is driving a wedge between kind of white leftists, or leftism in general, and Black and Brown folks having a more thorough understanding of these kind of radical, anti-capitalist class interests. And I think that was something that kept me from getting involved in leftism for a while before I realized that there's just some shit that I just need to go do myself, and go find people in community with me as opposed to trying to find a way to integrate my racial politics into these white leftist spaces that have no desire to talk about white supremacy and only want to talk about class but not talk about class in its kind of complete set of material implications and consequences.

I think that directly confronting the state, Black people have seen, is incredibly dangerous and scary and risky, and we have too vivid a memory of cointelpro. We have too vivid a cultural memory of even, like, Nat Turner's rebellion and these slave revolts and the ways that the state has crushed the… the MOVE bombings. We know exactly what the state will do if we try to organize ourselves outside of it in an attempt to contest it. I think we feel like we have a lot to lose, that what little we have is a lot to lose.

Josh: Yes

Zoé: I don't blame people for believing that.

Josh: Especially in the West because some of us can reap the benefits of imperialism. I think many of us, we have it bad, but it's not so bad when we compare it to the working class in the global south. I think we see that, like the dilemma between the two, we see that in America, we are I guess privileged when it comes to benefitting from imperialism, in a way, that things, shit is bad but it's not so bad that we need to risk our lives, I guess. I think that's the dilemma that a lot of Black and Brown people face in this country, at least when we see every day on the news when we see people dying in the hands of the police or whatever.

Zoé: Yeah, and as a middle class Black person, as a person who was raised by two immigrants and was taught, to some extent, to believe in the kind of bullshit of the American Dream and the potential for mobility, I feel like I have even more to hang onto, you know? I have access to a good institution, I have access to a particular amount of material resources, and so what investment do I have in ruining what opportunity I have to be a good capitalist?

Josh: Exactly.

Zoé: As much as I kind of make that joke, this kind of class traitorship is much — I'm not gonna do a sob story about it — but developing a class consciousness as a middle class person and rejecting the fact that this is the system that I have a responsibility to uphold through my

classed position, can be really hard, especially as Black person, especially as a "respectable" Black person, but I think that it's really important that we do that.

Josh: I agree and also about the point about anarchism, feeling that it's largely white, in a modern text. But I also think that people judge anarchism based on white anarchists rather than the theoretical foundation and examining the roots of why anarchists are the way they are, because I've encountered a lot of bad white anarchists especially are in organizing spaces and even on Twitter, even Marxists and socialists or "Tankies" or whatever you want to call them. In general, but we don't analyze the fact of how they are the way they are because of white supremacy because of the societal structure of whiteness as a whole and I think there's something to be said about how we kind of treat theory and treat different Leftists labels, I guess. We kind of treat them how, same way how liberals treat socialists where they kind of judge an individual socialist or an individual socialist regime and that's how they would judge socialism, I guess you can say, and we do the same thing and even leftists be doing the same thing with people on the left side of the political spectrum, we judge each other based on individuals, I guess you can say. Instead of the theory and the praxis and the work that is being done.

Zoé: Completely. Completely agree.

Josh: Alright, so do you think there is a place for Marxists as well as Anarchists — and even socialists in general — do you think there is a way, a place where we can co-exist in a mass movement, globally, or even so we can legitimately work together in a way that we can pass the point of inherent contradiction, I guess you can say. I know both sides don't believe in left unity, so-to-speak, mostly because of historical relevance, but do you think that's possible for the future?

Zoé: I think that, I think that the left can generally agree that capitalism is bad.

Josh: Mm-hmm.

Zoé: (Laughs) We can generally that Marx was right.

Josh: (Laughs) Basically, yes, haha.

Zoé: We can generally agree that material conditions are dire, and I think that if we can construct material politics on those grounds, on the grounds of what do we do to support people materially now, not necessarily an approach to community support that revolves around political education because that can be problematic, but if we orient our politics around supporting people and meeting people where they're at and meeting communities where they are and working within a framework of community need-and-demand, I.. Look, for example, the DSA has these brake-light clinics and I think that makes sense! I think that's a good idea. Hella Black people get stopped because their brake lights and tail lights and shit are out.

Josh: Yeah I heard about that, too.

Zoé: Let's provide a particular service around a particular need, you know, and it our sectarian differences don't really have anything to do with that. I think it's when we start trying to make hypotheses and projections around what's gonna happen when capitalism falls, I'm just like, I'm sorry, it's not gonna fall for a minute. It's fundamentally unsustainable, absolutely, but I don't think any of us can have a prediction of when it's going to stop. But in the meantime, there are people who need support, there are people who need resources, and I think that we've got a responsibility as a so-called enlightened leftists to support them in the ways that they ask us for support.

Josh: I agree, and I love that hear that too. I think people kind of forget that's the most important thing and like I said earlier, I think people emphasize the need for theory rather than

actually being on the ground and trying to do the work now rather than what's to come one hundred, two hundred years from now, or even less than that, which I think will come. Yeah, I think there's something to be said about that. We kinda lose track of what's important now and we just focus on what old, dead men said, I guess.

Zoé: And I think it's a bit of a cop-out.

Josh: Yeah, absolutely.

Zoé: I think it's a complete cop-out when our politic revolves around theory and trying to convince one another of whose theory is superior when, like, we could actually be doing some stuff.

Josh: Mm-hmm, and there's a lot of stuff to be done, too, as well.

Zoé: Absolutely.

Jared: I wanted to talk to you a little bit about a couple of articles that you've written recently and also move towards talking a little bit about Zimbabwe and Africa and decolonizing the Left's relationship with Africa, specifically, the global south more broadly. One of the things that struck me when I was going through some of your writing, you wrote a piece recently about experiences protesting with Antifa in Berkeley. You framed it initially in some conversations with your mother but tied resistance to 45 to her memory of resistance to colonial rule in, what was then Rhodesia, what is now Zimbabwe. I wondered if you could talk a little bit about that intergenerational relationship and how it has informed your anti-fascism.

Zoé: You know, I've had a lot of conversations with anarchists about why I'm so soft on Marxists because first of all, shut the fuck up, I have no reason not to be. And second of all because part of my radicalization came from my mother's older brother, who was a veteran of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. Him talking about community and talking about what moved him to leave home at the end of his teen years to go train in Tanzania and to go into the bush and learn to become a guerrilla fighter, was really profound to me. And these are things that my mom didn't really tell me until I was much older, and you know, she would warn me about the police in these different ways but they always came off as these kind of typical parenting concerns but from this kind of like weird, anti-black, respectable positions and it wasn't until recently she was like, "Yo, I almost had like a nervous breakdown or something after Trump got elected because it reminded me so much Ian Smith. It reminded me so much of kind of the dictator that Mugabe is now. I just feel like there's something that hurts so much about leaving home and coming to a place and having to stay in this place and losing my birthright," because she doesn't have her Zimbabwean citizenship anymore and having to fight this fight that feels so viscerally familiar.

So I, not to be corny, I feel like so much of my, as I was coming up and as I was radicalizing, she, my parents really resisted a lot of my new politics, but I think that through my radicalization, my mom has kind of found this new sense of self and understanding of what she went… of the colonial trauma that she went through when she was younger and has kind of found this new freedom in expressing herself now, as an adult. That has been something that's been incredibly liberating and really powerful to see. And, yeah, you know, I do it for my mom in this way, because I'm never gonna make a world that alleviates that trauma that she experienced when she was young, but with some hope, she'll see in me what she wanted to be able to do when she was younger, that she didn't feel like she had the opportunity to do. And, I don't know, there's something that feels kinda cheesy, but also not. I love my mom.

Jared: I think those intergenerational conversations are really, they definitely kind of deepen your relationship with your politics as well as your family. So one of the things that I wanted you

to talk about a little bit is, you know, one of the things that I've always enjoyed following you on Twitter and reading when you write about is, if we have any understanding of Africa and of post-colonial struggle, it's usually at a very surface level and a lot of times people who are really into Pan-Africanism can, you know, think that Mugabe is great. And you've really, definitely been somebody who's always written about it from your perspective, from knowing things from your family, things from people that you follow on social media there.

Zoé: And also things I've seen. I've gone home.

Jared: Yeah, absolutely, right. So I wanted to dig into a few questions on this that I think will help us deepen our understanding a little bit. Tell us about, like, one of the criticisms that you had in one of your articles on Mugabe was just about his inability to deal with land reform in a meaningful way to the people of the country, and I wondered if you could share a little bit of the history of that?

Zoé: Yeah, so after independence, there was a kind of a framework for future of governance and the progression of the state in this agreement called the Lancaster House Agreement. It was the rebels that had just come out of the bush, the ZANU Party, and the ZAPU Party. Those were the two liberation parties. The other party, I forget what it was called, but it was lead by Abel Muzorewa who, actually is my great uncle, which is kind of a complicated set of feelings, but that was the only legal political party because they denounced violent struggle, and so they were in a coalition government with the minority government, the Rhodesian government.

So, in the Lancaster House Agreement, one of the things that came out of it was a plan for land reform, which was going to be in the form of a willing buyer, willing seller agreement, so the British government and the American government, actually, President Jimmy Carter at the time, were going to give the new Zimbabwean government the funds to purchase the land back from the farmers who had expropriated the land during colonization. Unfortunately, no one wants to give away or even to sell the most fertile in a country that has extremely fertile land, and so the willing buyer, willing seller program actually stalled a process of a just land reform because I think that there should have been, personally, a seizure of land with compensation for the labor on it but not necessarily this process of negotiation with the remaining Rhodesian farmers.

But what President Mugabe has done in some of these land seizures is to take land and to give it to people who are not farmers and were not trained to be farmers. And so you have a net loss of agricultural productivity because the land that was previously productive there's nothing that's being produced on it, or a sufficient amount that's being produced on it. And during one of the periods of land seizures, the land was being taken to compensate war veterans who were previously getting these massive pensions from the government, and part of the reason that there was an economic crisis was because there was no money in the coffers because these war veterans were being given so much money, and they were being given so much money because they were one of the most important constituent bases for President Mugabe because so much of his claim to power, so much of his kind of mandate for leadership was this idea of the continuation of the Zimbabwean revolution and the liberation struggle, particularly as it revolved around land.

And so I can't speak too too too much of it beyond kind of what I understand in that way, but there is a scholar, now — he's since deceased — his name is Sam Moyle, and he has an incredible body of work around agrarian revolution and agrarian politics and land reform politics in Zimbabwe and he's very fair about his critiques of the Zimbabwean government but also about some of the things that the government has done positively. Like, the Zimbabwean government is perhaps, despite its faults, the only government on the continent, one of them, that is giving

land to its people and giving people the opportunity to have access to land to build homes on, to have land for farming, for subsistence farming, or to try to attempt to be more productive and to do some slightly larger scale farming. So, I think, overall, I don't think he's done a particularly good job, but I think there is a framework for a more fair and equitable process of land reform and land distribution that I think the government is not seizing upon.

Jared: Thank you. You touched on it, and this is one of the things that I think is complex sometimes for the left, beyond like- I think that what's interesting is that we focus a lot on, when we talk about the countries in the global south, we talk about Cuba, we talk about Venezuela, we talk about states that maybe, Evo in… Bolivia.

Zoé: Bolivia.

Jared: And so we talk about these states that are in some form a lot of times of a socialist state, and then we talk about supporting anti-imperialism, right? We have this idea that sort of structure of, like, if we criticize a government that is anti-U.S., that we're setting them up for U.S. — backed regime change, and I think that there's a reason for that fear, which is that the CIA is terrible and has participated in this process all across the world, and especially with states that don't play the way that the U.S. wants them to play in the global table. So I think it's interesting, Zimbabwe is interesting from that framework in that Mugabe will stand in front of the U.N. and make these bold, anti-imperialist statements, but I also think there's a lot of nuance that we miss from those conversations on the Left because we're not always really thinking about how do we support the people of these countries in a meaningful way or even if that's the right thing to do. But, just being more conscious, more knowledgeable beyond, "Well we don't want to criticize a state that is anti-US in any way because that will just become fodder for regime change." I just wanted to see what your thoughts are on that kind of line of thinking and the contradictions in it.

Zoé: Yeah, I think that being anti-America isn't that impressive of a politic. There are white supremacists who are anti-America. What does that mean for that to be the basis of your assessment of someone's politics in itself? Does that mean we suddenly start to value Confederate secessionists because they talk about how much they hate the American government? I think that, if that's not a bar that we would apply in any kind of politic domestically, I think that's a low bar to apply to leftist governments abroad. And I think we have a really difficult time thinking outside of binaries of countries being either anti-imperialist or being pro-West, because President Mugabe is anti-imperialist and he's still running, technically, a Marxist-Leninist state, technically, and yet why is our assessment of the Zimbabwean government based on what he articulates his government's value's are? How he articulates his own disdain for the West, which are much deeper and much more personal and petty than this ideological pivot away from western capitalism.

Why are we not looking at his failings to appoint a governor of the bank as someone who.. Like, why is he not appointing people who are competent? Why is he running the state like an enterprise? Like his own, personal bank account? We're looking at, there were times when there was hyper, hyper inflation, like, billions of percent of inflation, where people were spending billions of dollars on loaves of bread. And yes, we can attribute that to western sanctions, but previously to the western sanctions, he did allow economic policies in the 90s. Why are we not being critical and methodical of our critiques of these leaders of "left" states in the global south, and instead at looking at the shallow optics of their resentment of the west?

When there was a cholera outbreak, I think in 2007 and 2008, he refused to allow the deployment of resources to the areas that were hit the hardest, because he said that this was an example of western chemical warfare, or this is what people in his government were saying, and so they didn't support or roll out doctors to help people control the cholera outbreak. And then also I heard leftists when there were a lot of protests in 2015 and 16 under the #ThisFlag hashtag saying that, you know, this was an attempt by the west at regime change. [They'll say] "the people of Zimbabwe have voted for President Mugabe to stay in power," and I was like "he cheats, he rigs elections." What does it mean for us to be critical of elections in the United States, and then all of a sudden say that "Oh, well this is an election result in the a country in the #globalsouth — as though that's a single kind of unified entity — we can't contest the election results because this is what the people decided? And it's interesting whenever I make critiques of President Mugabe as… I think it's very interesting that all of a sudden, we don't have the capacity to have nuance because we're obsessed with these binaries of being for or against imperialism.

Jared: Yeah, and I've seen you receive these critiques from both sides [pro and anti-Mugabe folks]

Zoé: Yeah, and this is not me saying that we, I would honestly much rather have a leader, to some extent, be open or not articulate these really violent, anti-Western politics, but have a government that looks a little bit less far left and is actively providing for the people in that state. That would make me perfectly happy. If they're not in the pocket of international financial institutions, if they're not letting their country be a playground for multinational corporations. Yeah, I think this whole idea of ideological purity is a problem, and it's a problem when we do our organizing in the United States, and it's a problem when we try to have an international politic about states in the global south.

Jared: So this is another concept that you brought up in one of your articles about Zimbabwe, and it reminded me of so many other things that I've read or seen, and I think it's something that, again, is not very well understood, as many things are in the U.S. and among the U.S. left. I wanted to talk to you about it and see if we could go a little bit deeper on this quote. So, it says, the quote you had was: "And with the emigration of a potential vanguard professional/middle class out of Zimbabwe, many of the calls for or deeply sustained conversations around regime change exist within the diaspora, which is inadequate for meaningful internal mobilisation." So, I wanted you to expand a little bit on what you're talking about there, but also, this idea that I think a lot of people missed, that the professional and middle class of so many countries in the global south end up having to emigrate out of their country in order to have meaningful professional roles because they're just not there.

Zoé: So when I said that there goals for action were coming from the diaspora, I think that was me talking about the kinds of reforms that people were envisioning, these kinds of regime change as they would allow for a more western model of democracy, which I think is problematic, of course, because what would that entail? And, what was the second part of your question?

Jared: Well, also the idea that a lot of times — I know this is true in Latin America, largely — I haven't studied it as much with context of Africa, but I'm assuming it's a similar relationship, where you get enough education and you get enough credentials to become a profession, to become a "builder of the middle class" within your country, and the jobs for that type of work don't exist because of the way imperialism pushes down upon these countries, and so they end up emigrating out to Europe or to America to have a professional career, and then it creates this

disconnect with the diaspora, but it also harms those countries because they can't really build a middle class or a professional class to the same extent.

Zoé: I hear you. Yeah, so the last time I was in Zimbabwe, actually the day that I was supposed to be living and I got really ill. As it would turn out, I had to go get my appendix taken out. It's the third of January, it was a horrible day. I would prefer to go to a state hospital. If I were in Cuba and I had to have surgery, I would go to the state hospital. But in Zimbabwe, I don't know how much I trust state-run facilities because not too long before that, there was a letter that had gone out from some kind of professional organization of surgeons where they were not able to do surgeries because the government failed to import the anesthesia that was necessary to perform the surgeries.

So, these are the reasons for the brain drain because you have surgeons who are like, "I am literally unable to perform my job because of the incompetence of the government, or the government's flat-out refusal to supply with things that I need to be able to do my job." I think it's a combination of these middle class desires with just this inability to be able to feed yourself and your family because along with there not being the resources for surgeries, state employees were not being paid on time. So it's these kind of like classed desires, in addition to just like, "I can't eat." It was really interesting to kind of have a look into the way that the health system was functioning, even in a private hospital, because I ended up going to one of the private hospitals that the white people in Zimbabwe use a lot, to have an understanding of how private hospitals functioned in a state like Zimbabwe, and even the inequalities and inequities therein.

Jared: Yeah, absolutely.

Josh: I was thinking the past months ago how the continent of Africa has been seemingly neglected by the western left, and Dev (Devyn Springer) or @HalfAtlanta, he wrote an article technically on this same issue, and it had a bunch of my thoughts kind of written inside of the article, I guess you can say. What are some steps that you recommend for what some leftists… who is it who wish to decolonize our dialectics in relation to the needs of the African people today, in a way where we're not kind of — because I plugged our analysis of imperialism and different things going on in the global South, is very focused on states that we support and that are socialist, or whatever the case is, whether it's Cuba or Venezuela, or whatever the case is, it's mostly we kind of focus our efforts on countries who's states and who's leaders look the way we aspire to be, I guess you can say. A lot of people's anti-imperialist stances are very symbolic, I guess you can say. A lot of leftists, I could say, at least on Twitter. What are some steps that you recommend for western leftists?

Zoé: Yeah, the symbolic thing is interesting. I hear a lot of people memorializing Sankara but not necessarily talking about how Blaise Compaore is still president or still the leader of Burkina Faso, and what are the ways that he destroyed the country since he came into power twenty-something, thirty-something years ago. But I think, again, I think this goes back to the ways in which we fail to conceptualize how capitalism functions. It has functioned, historically, that we cannot have an "anti-imperialist politic" without understanding that anti-blackness shapes the contours of imperialism, that Europe was not able to be an imperial power without stealing the natural resource wealth of the continent, of chopping the continent up to these manageable states, of enslaving and exporting African people from West Africa to colonies in the Americas.

And what we're seeing right now in Africa, across the continent, is the legacy of imperialism, and we can't oppose imperialism without properly understanding the ways in which it continues to function, the ways that structural adjustment policies destroyed the continent, and there are

countries that are surely continued to be in debt from these structural adjustments, that there are still leaders and elections that are being influenced by external influences across the continent, and that people are protesting in response to leaders continuing to be hand-picked by the West, that there are conflicts that are ongoing because of Western involvement. You have what's going on in the Congo, you know, droning in Somalia, in West Africa, in Niger, in Mali, in Libya, that Africa is as much…

Josh: Military presence, as well…

Zoé: Yeah, that Africa is as much a kind of battleground as the Middle East, in a lot of different ways and in a lot of similar ways, with the expansion of AFRICOM. Even South Africa that's not really involved how we understand the global war on terror that happens in Mali, in Niger, in Somalia, the South African military just did exercises with the United States government. What is that going to mean for the ways that private security and that state security, that non-military state security responds to protestors, and the student protests that are continuing to happen across South Africa with the FeesMustFall movement.

That we continue even on the left as we reject the kind of colonial homogenization of the continent, we continue to treat Africa like a thing, a thing that gets employed in our rhetorical opposition to imperialism, but not a continent of 54 different countries where the people in each country have different needs that are different on the basis of ethnicity, of class. We have this kind of like, pan-continental politic that we often use as an excuse to understand the ways in which colonialism is continuing to harm people in different continents uniquely but similarly still. I wrote a piece about how we need to reject a kind of Afrocentric, Pan-Africanism where we continue to abstract the continent into this far-past existence and state of existence, and we don't see it as a continent that is continuing to change. That people are demanding all kinds of things from the government, that are developing all kinds of politics, have all kinds of political alignments and orientations that go beyond these kind of statist politics that are easy for us to understand.

I think that we owe an anti-imperialist politic of the continent much more complexity than we give it, and we shouldn't just be focusing on what's happened to Libya because the left misses the Gadafi. There are 53 other countries that are going through a whole lot of shit. We owe it in the name of global solidarity, in the name of benefitting from imperialism as Americans, in different ways, to know what's happening over there.

Josh: I completely agree, too. Like you just said, we need to kind of reject the symbolic gestures. Especially with hashtags and things like that, I think it's important when it comes to highlighting these issues, but in the long-term, a lot of people it's more about the aesthetic of it all instead of actually trying to help or learn or care about what's happening over there or what's happening in countries in general, not even just on the continent of Africa but also countries in the global south in general, we kind of have a much more symbolic approach understanding and caring about them and the things that the country that we live in, the country that we benefit from the wages that are here and things like that. We kind of just forget about that. We forget that we're in the position of the oppressor, in that sense, even though it's technically us, you know. But yeah, I completely agree with you though.

Jay: Thank you so much. Probably the last thing we should give you space just to say where people can find you, where they can connect with you, that piece.

Zoé: I'm on Twitter, tweeting entirely too much, @ztsamudzi, that's my handle. I guess I have a website, zoesamudzi.com, which is just about stuff that I'm doing, professionally and otherwise. Yeah, that's it for the most part.

Josh: Thank you so much.

Jay: Thank you so much for coming on.

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