



## Theorizing Capitalist Imperialism for an Anti-Imperialist Praxis Towards a Rodneyan World-Systems Analysis

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### Abstract

*How does one craft an explicitly left theory of anti-imperialism that would animate an anti-imperialist praxis? World-systems analysis has a long history of engagement with theories of anti-imperialism from an explicitly Leninist perspective. For the founding fathers of World-Systems Analysis—Immanuel Wallerstein, Giovanni Arrighi, Samir Amin, and Andre Gunder Frank—anti-imperialism was an early central concern. Each of the four founders of world-systems analysis reads Lenin’s theory of imperialism seriously, but each has slightly different interpretations. One significant commonality they share is that they adopt Lenin’s periodization of imperialism, seeing imperialism as emergent in the late 19th century as part of a particular stage within the historical development of capitalism. However, as I will argue in this essay, perhaps it would be preferable to temporally expand Lenin’s concept of imperialism. Walter Rodney’s concept of “capitalist imperialism,” as I shall show in this essay, similarly calls Lenin’s periodization into question. Thereby, putting Rodney in conversation with Amin, Arrighi, Frank, and Wallerstein, leads me to further historicize world-systems’ theories of global imperialism thereby refining existing theories and levying that to build stronger praxis.*

**Keywords:** Political Economy, World-Systems, Capitalism, Imperialism, Class Struggle, Walter Rodney, Dar es Salaam School



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Anti-Imperialism is not an inherently leftist endeavor. The non-aligned movement, for example, while a continued assertion of the Global South to determine its own political future (and as such a threat to former colonial powers [Burton 1966]), had its left critics who saw no honor in refusing to take sides when neo-imperialism limited the ability of revolutionary Third Worldism to take root. Said Muammar Qaddafi (1987: 47) of the non-aligned movement, “the world is made up of two camps: the liberation camp and the imperialist one. There is no place for those who are non-aligned. We are not neutral and totally aligned against the aggressor...Long live the liberated. Down with imperialism.” Through this perspective, we can interpret non-alignment as a centrist anti-imperialism, while Wahhabism, for example, as a project spearheaded by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia in the early 1970s to counter secular Marxist Third Worldism through the creation of a puritanical Islamic alternative (Prashad 2007), is an example of right wing anti-imperialism. Furthermore, anti-imperialist praxis that is mere reaction against contemporary U.S. imperialism, such as defending the Assad regime in Syria because it is anti-United States, for example; or patriarchal anti-imperialisms that support the oppression of Global South women because so doing is counter to Western cultural norms, or a racist anti-imperialism that defends the oppression of minorities by Global South states because those states are against the United States, does nothing to advance a left anti-imperialist praxis. These examples reveal that anti-imperialism as an abstract concept is not inherently left. Therefore, an important question facing the contemporary left is how do we craft an explicitly left theory of anti-imperialism that would animate a better anti-imperialist praxis?

There are several existing theoretical paradigms of various epistemes and each with a different political praxis that center on questions of imperialism/anti-imperialism: postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, Maoism, dependency theory, world-systems analysis, and so on. Each of these paradigms have different answers to the question of imperialism/anti-imperialism; and while I have allegiances of varying degrees with most of these sometimes overlapping paradigms, some are constructed in a way that better motivates left anti-imperialist praxis. World-systems analysis, in particular, has had a long history of engagement with theories of anti-imperialism. For the “gang of four” (the founding fathers of world-systems analysis)—Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, Andre Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein—anti-imperialism was an early central concern (Amin 1976; Arrighi 1978; Frank 1974; 1978; 2014; Wallerstein 1973; 1984).

Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, Andre Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein theorize imperialism from a Leninist perspective (albeit it with some Maoist influences at times). Lenin (1939: 89) defines imperialism as consisting of five essential features: monopoly, finance capital, expansion leading to the export of capital and international monopolies, and the territorial division of the world among the “greatest capitalist powers.” Each of the founding fathers of world-systems analysis emphasize different aspects of Lenin’s imperialism. Immanuel Wallerstein (1984), for example, emphasizes imperialism as the territorial division of the world among European powers. Giovanni Arrighi (1978) emphasizes the logic of monopoly and finance capital which engenders a tendency to war among European powers. Samir Amin (1976) emphasized monopoly capitalism’s role in creating uneven development through the creation of a hyper-exploited Global

South proletariat. As Amin writes, “Lénine exprime admirablement lorsqu’il propose la formulation nouvelle : «Prolétaires de tous les pays, peuples opprimés, unissez-vous»”<sup>1</sup> (Amin 1976: 117-118) emphasizing that an anti-imperialist praxis should be rooted in the struggles of Global South workers against capitalist exploitation and imperialist oppression. Andre Gunder Frank (1974) sees imperialism as a dialectical whole; that the underdevelopment of Latin America is the result of its full incorporation into global capitalism on unequal terms. In the context of the 20th century, Frank contends, there is no disambiguating capitalism from imperialism.

While the founding fathers of world-systems analysis define what imperialism is, they also delineate what it is not. Amin (1976), for example, makes a distinction between territorial expansion and imperialism; Arrighi (1978) distinguishes between colonialism in previous stages of historical capitalism compared to late 19th and 20th century colonialism rooted in the imperative of finance capital. Frank (2014) emphasizes that Lenin’s monopoly stage of capitalism historically coincides with the first time in world history that Europe overtook the rest of the world as the center of capital accumulation. Wallerstein (1984) distinguishes between anti-imperialism and class struggle through conceptualizing national liberation movements as either “nationalist” or “social” in their orientation to revolution.

While the relative emphasis of the founders of world-systems analysis on various aspects of Lenin’s theory of imperialism varies, all four concepts of imperialism are ultimately compatible. One significant commonality they share is that Amin, Arrighi, Frank, and Wallerstein all adopt Lenin’s periodization of imperialism, seeing imperialism as emergent in the late 19th century as part of a particular stage within the historical development of capitalism. Each of the four founders reads Lenin seriously, but each has slightly different interpretations. This tension in their respective readings of Lenin typically is resolved by bracketing Lenin’s imperialism to a specific conjuncture (Arrighi 1978; Wallerstein 1984), or through conflating it with monopoly capitalism (Frank 1974; Amin 1976). However, as I will argue in this essay, perhaps it would be preferable to *expand* Lenin’s concept of imperialism temporally. Instead of simply bracketing imperialism as a characteristic of a particular historical conjuncture we open up the concept to see imperialism as a centuries-long process of monopoly, finance capital, expansion leading to the export of capital and international monopolies, and the territorial division of the world among the world’s most powerful political formations beginning with the transition to capitalist finance in the early modern Italian city-states. Further historicizing theories of imperialism is compatible with world-systems analysis’ dynamic *longue durée* conceptualization of capitalism, which emphasizes capitalism’s mutability and many transformations over time and space, while also describing capitalism’s consistent general tendencies.

While there is no denying the significant insights and important interpretive theory work that world-systems founders developed around the concept of imperialism, Lenin’s periodization of imperialism should not be blindly adopted by world-systems analysts. Lenin’s *Imperialism* (1939)

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: Lenin expressed this admirably when he proposed the new formula: “Workers of the world and oppressed people unite”

is temporally limited, in that it is an analysis of just one particular conjuncture in the long history of capitalism. Before the late 19th century (i.e.; the period Lenin identifies as the transition to the imperialist stage of capitalist development) however, Genoese-financed Iberian colonialism along with Dutch colonialism was rooted in the imperatives of finance capital (Arrighi 1994); which then led to the super-exploitation of labor in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Rodney 1972; Frank 1978; Sen 1997) creating one single global system (Frank 1998). So while Britain did capitalist territorialism “*on a grander scale*” than previous systemic cycles of accumulation, making it “the central feature” (Arrighi 1994: 144, emphasis in original) of its systemic cycle of accumulation, it follows that in the context of each distinct systemic cycle of accumulation, imperialism should articulate itself differently and necessarily intensify over time. Lenin’s imperialism, I contend, solely captures the imperialism historically specific to the British systemic cycle of accumulation. As Arrighi writes in *The Geometry of Imperialism* (1978: 12, emphasis in original), “definition of imperialism must be *historically determinate*: its validity must be continually checked against the events and tendencies observable at a particular moment or in a given situation.” Amin (1976) applies a similar logic when he levies Mao to convincingly argue that 1968 marked a transition to a different stage of imperialism than what Lenin defined, but despite the changing features of imperialism after 1968, imperialism as a system endured. By Amin and Arrighi’s logic we should not just read imperialism forward through time but also read it back, and see the 18th and early 19th centuries as perhaps a different phase of imperialism, but imperialism nonetheless. Walter Rodney’s concept of imperialism, as I shall show in this essay, similarly calls Lenin’s periodization into question. Thereby, putting Rodney (back) in conversation with Amin, Arrighi, Frank and Wallerstein’s important work on theories of imperialism leads me to further historicize Leninist and Maoist concepts of global imperialism, further refining our existing theories of imperialism and levying that to build stronger praxis.

While Walter Rodney’s contributions further open theories of imperialism to expose a longer historical trajectory of global imperialism than the traditional Leninist conceptualization, Rodney’s body of work remains largely forgotten by contemporary world-systems analysts. Only nine articles in the history of the *Journal of World-Systems Research*, the official American Sociological Association section journal, cite Rodney. Black scholars in the United States and scholars of color living and working in the Global South have not only a particularly difficult time in gaining recognition for their work in American academe, but also are systematically erased from the cannon once recognized (see Morris 2015: 198). This is especially true for scholars who propose more revolutionary interventions and those who are committed to Marxist political economy. Oliver Cox’s career trajectory is an illustrative example. In the 1930s, Cox matriculated at the University of Chicago hoping to do a PhD in economic history but soon switched to sociology, finding the economics department too mainline for his heterodox approach. Influenced by Werner Sombart and Paul Sweezy, the majority of Cox’s scholarly work was on the political economy of capitalism in macro-historical perspective. But few of Cox’s contemporaries in historical sociology and Marxist sociology acknowledged the depth of his contributions to these disciplinary subfields. After spending the entirety of his career at historically Black colleges and

universities as a result of American apartheid<sup>2</sup>, Cox joined the sociology department at Wayne State in 1970. But his time at Wayne State was rife with conflict. He had been hired assuming he would teach and supervise dissertations on the sociology of race, but instead insisted on teaching in his area of expertise—Marxist political economy and the historical development of global capitalism. Contemporary scholars explain Cox’s lack of acclaim among his contemporaries as a product of the racism of the subfields of historical sociology and Marxist sociology. As within these two subfields of American sociology, the most acclaimed and renowned scholars have been historically, and to a large extent still tend to be, white men.

While the anti-Blackness of the academy is one possible explanation for the contemporary neglect of Rodney’s work, one can also point to a divergence in praxis and method by the end of the 1970s when world-systems analysis and Rodney went their separate ways. Over time, Rodney increasingly emphasized his commitment to anti-capitalist movements (with a particular focus on questions of race-ethnicity), which moved him further away from the academy and closer to movements that were not solely concerned with neo-colonialism but also with critiquing the postcolonial state for its failures to deliver on the revolutionary promises of national liberation after independence from colonial rule. Of post-independent African and Caribbean states he said, “We are dealing with state power and that we must examine the class nature of that power” (Rodney 1974: 40). World-systems analysis, in contrast, became more entrenched within the academy following the 1970s; and in a move away from its initial reliance on anti-imperialist Marxists such as Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, and Walter Rodney (Wallerstein 1970; 1979; 1986; 2006; 2009), world-systems’ anti-imperialist Marxist “canon” was eventually replaced with the Annales School and classic works of European political economy. The movements for national independence that inspired world-systems analysts of the 1968 generation became less central to world-systems analysis by the 1980s, and with changing global politico-economic dynamics, other world-systems antecedents began to take priority. Rodney’s later work also focused on more local class analyses, largely abandoning the world-system as unit of analysis in his work, though one might contend that it was an implicit dialectical whole within which his more local class analyses were taking place. Nonetheless, Rodney’s move to local class analyses was largely incompatible world-systems’ shift in trajectory after the 1980s to focus on dynamics of global political economy over other concerns. Through this discussion of these divergent trajectories, my aim is not to conclude that one strategy or agenda is preferable to the other, just to point out that, over time, world-systems and Walter Rodney chose distinct, and increasingly incongruous, research trajectories.

Recovering Rodney’s work as a foundational to world-systems analysis is important in redressing anti-Blackness, but will also help world-systems analysis to craft a richer concept of anti-imperialism that is explicitly left. In its early days, world-systems analysis offered a unique

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<sup>2</sup> By American apartheid I mean policies of political, economic, and social discrimination and separation of Black and white Americans, typified by, but not limited to, Jim Crow Laws implemented from the 1880s on. In 1964, Jim Crow Laws were ruled unconstitutional with the ratification of the Civil Rights Act, though many Jim Crow Laws and other laws that facilitate discrimination and separation still remain on the books.

global critique of capitalist imperialism rooted in the historical materialist tradition (Amin 1976; Arrighi 1978; Frank 1978), and we should go back to these older conversations around anti-imperialism to assert that the *only* anti-imperialism is a dialectical materialist anti-imperialism rooted in histories of class struggle. By bringing Rodney (and other left anti-imperialist thought) back into world-systems analysis, we can better theorize imperialism as part of world-historical capitalism and thereby build a better anti-capitalist praxis. The objective of this essay is to examine four theoretical themes in Rodney's writings—capitalism, imperialism, class struggle, and race and capitalism—in order to show how revisiting Rodney's concept of "capitalist imperialism" not only recovers Rodney's work as a founding father of world-systems analysis, but also strengthens our theories of imperialism/anti-imperialism. In recovering world-systems analysis' intellectual roots in Dar es Salaam and centering the concept of capitalist imperialism in our description of the historical development of global capitalism, there is potential to both revitalize the theoretical conversation on anti-imperialism within world-systems analysis, and to develop a better anti-imperialist praxis for contemporary struggles across the globe.

### Biographical Background

Walter Rodney was born in Georgetown, Guyana on March 23, 1942. He received a scholarship to attend the University of the West Indies where he majored in history and was involved in student politics. While in Jamaica, he was especially interested in the history of the slave trade and was greatly influenced by the work of Eric Williams, along with that of his mentor, CLR James (Dembélé 2015). In 1963, Rodney graduated with First Class Honors and left to pursue a PhD at London's School of African and Oriental Studies. While he had already learned French as a student in Georgetown (H. Campbell 1980), at SOAS he learned Portuguese and Spanish in order to carry out his thesis, eventually published as *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800* (Rodney 1970). He did archival work for his dissertation in Lisbon, Seville, Rome, and London (Lewis 1998; Boukari-Yabara 2010). Though Rodney was a committed Marxist he dismissed much of the British left including Trotskyist groups and the *New Left Review*, instead finding more resonance in the work of Samir Amin and Amílcar Cabral (Lewis 1998). On his dissertation work he said:

The ideology of this I had to work out myself. For there was nobody in that SOAS seminar during the whole of the three years I was there, who could remotely be termed a Marxist, a quasi-Marxist, or a Neo-Marxist of any variety... It was thus a painful process of trying to read Marxism on one's own and applying it to the historical data. I think some of that sense comes out in [my dissertation book]. Looking at that work now, I would certainly not see it as a strong statement of Marxist scholarship by any means. It was just strong enough, let's say (Rodney, quoted in Hill 1990: 26-27).

This book remains one of the most important historiographies of West Africa.

After earning his PhD in 1966, Rodney was hired by the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. After a year, he returned to Jamaica where he joined the history department at the

University of the West Indies. In Jamaica, he attended groundings with Rastafarians where he sought to fuse Rastafarianism with Black Nationalism, class analysis, and theories of imperialism (Lewis 1998). These exchanges inspired *Groundings with my Brothers* (Rodney 1969). En route to writing *Groundings*, in 1968, Rodney travelled to Montréal to attend the Black Writers' Congress where he presented a paper entitled, "African History in the Service of Black Revolution" (Lewis 1998; see Austin 2018). Upon his return to Jamaica, Rodney was banned entry. The Special Branch, aided by the CIA (West 2008), stated Rodney posed a threat, in that he "was charismatic at the grassroots level and had a following among intellectuals" (Rodney, quoted in Lewis 1998). That evening, students met at Mary Seale Hall at the University of the West Indies and then marched to the office of the Ministry of Home Affairs and to the Prime Minister's office to deliver a petition demanding his return to campus (Gonsalves 1979; Payne 1983; Lewis 1998). From the perspective of the state, the mass movement in support of Rodney confirmed initial assumptions that Rodney posed a threat (Lewis 1998). Students seized city buses to block roads, police responded with violence against the student protestors, workers and the unemployed then joined the protests, and soon, violence ensued (Gonsalves 1979).

Upon his deportation from Jamaica, Rodney travelled to Toronto before returning to the University of Dar es Salaam where he was an instrumental part of establishing the Dar es Salaam school of historical social science along with colleagues John Saul, Giovanni Arrighi, Issa Shivji, and others. Through these exchanges, Rodney wrote his best-known book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Rodney 1972). In 1974, Rodney left Dar es Salaam, with a key stopover at Binghamton where he was visiting faculty before his return to Guyana, where he was appointed professor of history at the University of Guyana. Once in Guyana, Rodney set his sights to working class history to alleviate racial conflict and unite the Brown and Black working classes. His posthumously published book based on this research is entitled, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Rodney 1980).

Rodney's scholarship on Guyana's working classes coincided with his political work of organizing Guyana's working class across racial divides under the slogan of "Brown and black fight back" (Petras 1981: 48). As CLR James (1982: 137-138) described, Rodney's logic was "look, let us stop this business, this Jagan versus Burnham, this black versus East Indian situation. Let us come to terms about this. This was a farseeing political move. He did that." By undermining deep rooted racial divisions, Rodney threatened Prime Minister Forbes Burnham's constituency which was strengthened by Burnham's pitting of Afro-Guyanese workers against Indo-Guyanese workers, thereby continuing the British colonial legacy of divide and rule. Burnham initially blocked Rodney's appointment as professor at the University of Guyana (T. Campbell 1981: 57), and despite receiving offers for professorships in the United States and England, Rodney chose to stay in Guyana, teaching on a contract basis. Soon after, Rodney was accused of arson, but the charges did not stick. But on June 13th, 1980, Burnham succeeded in assassinating Rodney with a car bomb.

### The Dar es Salaam School

While the State University of New York at Binghamton was where world-systems analysis achieved global renown, it was at the University of Dar es Salaam where world-systems analysis came into being. Immanuel Wallerstein (1986) noted that, beginning with Rodney's doctoral thesis—well before world-systems analysis caught on—Rodney developed a theoretical perspective which described capitalism as a mode of production that transformed the world into a single system thereby engendering a relationship of exploitation between the underdeveloped countries and metropolitan capitalist economies that over time led to chronic dependency and an intensification of exploitation. Rodney, claims Wallerstein, was therefore one of the first world-systems analysts. Those with connections to Dar es Salaam, included some of the most important world-systems analysts such as Immanuel Wallerstein (Rojas 2013), Walter Rodney<sup>3</sup>, Issa Shivji, John Saul, as well as Giovanni Arrighi, who joined the University of Dar es Salaam in 1966 after being deported from Rhodesia for his participation in Rhodesia's movement for national liberation (Arrighi and Harvey 2009). With the intersection of national independence movement leaders from across Africa, Black liberation movement leaders from the United States, and Marxist intellectuals from across the globe, the University of Dar es Salaam attracted intellectuals who innovated new ways of doing social science history of the Global South.

In 1964, Terrance O. Ranger was appointed the first professor of history at the University of Dar es Salaam. Tanzania's first President, Julius Nyerere, tasked the department with creating an anti-colonial history of not just Tanzania, but also anti-colonial African and global-comparative history (Maddox 2019). Oral history methodologies were a cornerstone of their toolkit given biased colonial archives and historiography (Jeater 2016). Nyerere's commitment to *ujamaa*<sup>4</sup> allowed Rodney and other younger faculty members to push the Dar es Salaam School towards an explicitly historical materialist approach to social science history. The goal of the Dar es Salaam School was to rethink the practice of historical research in the service of anti-colonialism (Maddox 2019). The Dar es Salaam School can be characterized by five main principles in its approach to social science history: (1) Opposed to seeing pre-colonial history as static and "primitive" and instead depicts pre-colonial political economy as advanced, dynamic, and well-organized; (2)

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<sup>3</sup> This essay admittedly focuses on Rodney's intellectual commitments while a member of the history department at Dar es Salaam. I encourage others to analyze his community engagement and intellectual commitments during his time at Mona and in Guyana.

<sup>4</sup> While *ujamaa* is often translated as "community" or "familyhood", Julius Nyerere (1968: 12) defined *ujamaa* as follows: "*Binadamu wote ni ndugu zangu, na Afrika ni moja*. If this had been originally put in English, it could have been: 'I believe in Human Brotherhood and the Unity of Africa.' 'Ujamaa', then, or 'Familyhood', describes our socialism. It is opposed to capitalism, which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of exploitation of man by man; and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build its happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man. We in Africa, have no need of being 'converted' to socialism or being 'taught' democracy. Both are rooted in our own past... every individual on this continent is his brother. It was in the struggle to break the grip of colonialism that we learnt of the need for unity.... Our recognition of the family to which we all belong must be extended yet further—beyond the tribe, the community, the nation, or even the continent—to embrace the whole society of mankind. This is the only logical conclusion for true socialism."

Centers local agency in the depiction of anti-colonial movements; (3) Looks to Global South theory and philosophy (such as Amílcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, and Che Guevara) for ideological inspiration for anti-colonial and anti-capitalist movements; (4) Centers the role of anti-colonial trade unions independent from European political parties as the driving force in anti-colonial movements; (5) Critiques post-independence leaders and elites as upholding colonial class structures (Rodney termed this new phase of capitalist exploitation, “flag independence”) while also acknowledging the key role elites played in national independence movements.

It’s important to note that there were debates and differences within the Dar es Salaam School. One example is the debate between “African nationalists,” such as Ranger, who believed the unit of analysis for historical research should be the newly independent state in order to better serve postcolonial state building efforts; versus the “Fanonesque view” that was more pessimistic about the role of the national bourgeoisie in state building projects of newly independent states so instead looked to regional, continental, and global histories in order to do truly anti-colonial history (Denoon and Kuper 1970). Ranger (1971), in a rejoinder to Donald Denoon and Adam Kuper (1970), however, complicated this debate stating that even those who worked on the level of the nation state gestured towards the larger regional context in their historiographies, the department as a whole was critical of nationalism, and had a unified pedagogical strategy of teaching national histories in regional, continental, and global comparative context. The Dar es Salaam School was not only an important antecedent to world-systems analysis, but has long been foundational for Black diaspora studies and the New Indian Labor History as an important inspiration for historiographic methods that can help craft an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist historiography of the Global South (Plys 2019).

With this new approach to historical social science research, Rodney similarly innovated new pedagogical strategies. Revolutionary pedagogy was important to Rodney but he also believed that education without transformations in political economy could not lead to “total liberation of the society” (Lewis 1998: 154). In order to transform the University from a site of social reproduction to one of social transformation, Rodney pushed against the artificial divisions of the historical social sciences into economics, political science, geography, sociology, anthropology, and history; and instead strove to restructure undergraduate and graduate curriculum under the principles of *ujamaa* (H. Campbell 1991). This restructuring involved changing course content and developing a common foundational course for all history and social science undergraduate students in order to provide students with the ideological tools to understand social development as a unitary process. Restructured courses involved weekend practicums where students would work in *ujamaa* villages to learn socialist praxis by doing. Rodney developed courses that would bring students together with urban workers so that both students and workers could learn Marxist theory through engaging with each other and the texts (H. Campbell 1991). This new research and pedagogical approach attracted students from across the region who were involved in various national independence movements (Prashad 2018).

Some of the texts that were commonly found on Rodney’s course reading lists included Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, Kwame Nkrumah’s *Neo-Colonialism* and *The Last Stage of*

*Imperialism*, along with works by Samir Amin, Paul Baran, Paul Sweezy, and what have been called the “classics of Marxism” (Shivji 2012: 86; Kamata 2020). Visiting speakers Rodney invited to Dar es Salaam included Kwame Ture, CLR James, and Cheddi Jagan (Shivji 2012). In his graduate teaching, his emphasis was on rigorous methods in the service of Marxist praxis. In 1970-1971, for example, Rodney taught the graduate seminar “Historians and Revolutions,” focused on historiography of the Russian and French revolutions in order to introduce graduate students to dialectical and historical materialism as method for historiography of revolutionary movements (Benjamin and Kelley 2018). Rodney believed that

One’s political contribution should come out of one’s principal work activity, whatever that happens to be, insofar as it is possible. ...so long as I remain an academic, I must attempt to make the most important political input during those very many hours that I spend contributing to teaching or research or whatever other aspects of academic life come into play. (Rodney, quoted in Hill 1990: 35)

His contribution to praxis came through not just his research but also his pedagogy and service work.

Indian labor historian Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (1983) contends that the Dar es Salaam School, similar to critical Latin American historians of the 1970s, solved the Global South’s problem of “historylessness”. In other words, that the history of the Global South was often depicted as a history of great men, not as the history of the people who forged society. The Dar es Salaam School, claims Bhattacharya, paved the way for social science to take up “intellectual decolonization” by practicing “history from below” (Bhattacharya 1983: 3). However, it is well to remember that the concept of “history from below” comes not from the “Third World,” but from English historians of the early 20th century.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, “history from below” is not inherently “Third Worldist” nor even necessarily left (see Bahl 2003); but through the historiographical methods of the Dar es Salaam School, “history from below” could become Marxist and Third Worldist (Bhattacharya 1983).

To tell a critical history of workers and peasants in the Global South, historical analysis must go beyond simply broadening the scope of history or adding new subjects for analysis (Bhattacharya 1983). First, one must break with nationalist historiography. Second (and more importantly), one must view decolonization as not a struggle against colonialism for all people; instead, “one must not ‘render the colonial epoch in the history of the colonial people without class struggles’” (Shivji, quoted in Bhattacharya 1983: 8). In other words, historical analysis must not view decolonization as affecting all colonial subjects equally but should narrate decolonization through the lens of class struggle in order to dismantle power and hierarchy. As Samir Amin (1976: 17) puts it, “*la lutte des classes avant tout!*”<sup>6</sup> But making class struggle the central focus of histories of decolonization, Bhattacharya (1983) claims, is an obvious solution, even though it is one that

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<sup>5</sup> See Iles and Roberts 2012 for an excellent overview and anti-authoritarian critique of the European origins of “history from below”.

<sup>6</sup> Author’s translation: The class struggle above all else!

has largely been overlooked by postcolonial historiography. Therefore, Bhattacharya contends, historical social science should look to the Dar es Salaam School for historiographical methods and epistemology because the Dar es Salaam School does a much better job of bringing class struggle to the fore of historical analyses of the Global South.

### **For a Rodney World-Systems Analysis**

In this essay, I focus on how Rodney's concept of "capitalist imperialism" as articulated through his theory of capitalism, imperialism, and class struggle can emphasize the centrality of imperialism to the historical development of capitalism as a way to complement, build on, and further historicize Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, Andre Gunder Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein's rich concepts of imperialism. Rodney's body of work has far more to offer beyond the concepts I focus on in this essay, and it would do well to revisit the many theoretical, empirical, and methodological themes in Rodney's oeuvre; and to produce empirical and theoretical work inspired by his concepts along with the work on anti-imperialism of world-systems analysis' founders.

### **Capitalism**

Rodney's theory of capitalism was global from the capitalist system's origins in the fifteenth century, yet hierarchical in its creation of a two-tiered state system comprised of a category of capitalist-imperial states that dominated the rest of the world creating enduring dependent relationships. Drawing on John Stuart Mill, Rodney (1972) contends that the transition to capitalism was a global process involving the interaction of multiple world regions. From the 15th century<sup>7</sup>, as Europe was transitioning to capitalism, connections to what would eventually become the Global South were essential to primitive accumulation (Rodney 1972). This fact of the transition to capitalism as a truly global process, Rodney claims, has been forgotten by more recent European scholarship on the transition to capitalism. But European classical political economy of the 19th century, assesses Rodney, "certainly had no illusions about the interconnections between their national economies and the world at large" (Rodney 1972: 82).

The goal of capitalism, as Rodney sees it, is "to make the maximum profit" (Rodney 1972: 10). Rooted in the logic of the endless accumulation of capital, European capitalists looked to geographical expansion as a lucrative source of profit. In seeking out profit making opportunities

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth emphasizing that while Rodney's (1972) analysis of African political economy spans the *longue durée*, he takes great effort to show dynamism over time. This is accomplished through a meticulous attention to periodization in a way that gives local agency to communities across the African continent, but also largely adheres to accepted periodization of Marxist modes of production; albeit rethinking conventional periodization of Marxist modes of production for the African regional context. As Rodney (1972: 38) puts it, "all history is transition from one stage to another, but some historical situations along the line have more clearly distinguishable characteristics than others." In so rendering time as characterized by constant change, yet also loosely adhering to Marxist modes of production, he is deeply attuned to showing the perpetual dynamism of African political economy from ancient history through the present.

outside of Europe, European capitalists created a more “raw,” “naked” capitalism in the Global South. In *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800* (Rodney 1970a) Rodney writes,

As individuals and as part of an economic system, [Europeans] sought profits in a strictly definable sense, and they calculatedly threw aside all restrictions. In modern capitalist society, rules are drawn up to protect members from devouring each other raw; but on the Upper Guinea Coast and the West African littoral as a whole, capitalism paraded without even a loin-cloth to hide its nakedness. With no restraints on either side, the confrontation of the two cultures which produced the Atlantic slave trade was neither peaceful nor orderly, contrary to the exploratory revision, and it proved entirely detrimental to African society, which was the weaker party. (Rodney 1970a: 254)

Through this geographical expansion Rodney (1972: 136) identified “the trend within capitalism to concentrate or polarize wealth and poverty at two opposite extremes.” This polarization, for Rodney, operates in three arenas. Rodney theorizes a tendency to polarization within the class system, among different segments of the capitalist class (with finance capital at the top), and polarization on the level of the inter-state system.

Given polarization within the interstate system, “development,” for Rodney, is illusory. Rodney (1972: 105) defines development as “capacity for self sustaining growth. It means that an economy must register advances which in turn will promote further progress.” Because of how colonized territories transitioned to capitalism, the potential for development was squandered through the various power dynamics and arrangements created by colonialism to benefit the Imperial metropole at the expense of the colonies. In this vein, Rodney cautions his reader against seeing globalization, neoliberalism, or other forms of global integration as avenues to development. Integration of this sort, he writes,

Is a type of false or pseudo integration which is a camouflage for dependence. In contemporary times, it takes the form of free-trade areas in the formerly colonized sections of the world. Those free-trade areas are made to order for the penetration of multi-national corporations. From the fifteenth century onwards, pseudo integration appeared in the form of the interlocking of African economies over long distances from the coast, so as to allow the passage of human captives and ivory from a given point inland to a given port on the Atlantic or Indian Ocean. For example, captives were moved from Congo through to what is now Zambia and Malawi to Mozambique, where Portuguese, Arab, or French buyers took them over. That was not genuine integration of the economies of African territories concerned. Such trade merely represented the extent of foreign penetration, thereby stifling local trades. (Rodney 1972: 111-112)

Rodney urges his reader to see forms of trade and exchange in historical perspective in order to better understand power and hierarchy latent in the capitalist world-economy. “Placing the whole question in historical perspective” he writes, “allows us to see that...the general tendency has been for capitalism to underdevelop Africa” (Rodney 1972: 108).

Perhaps Rodney's most unique contribution to our understanding of the historical development of capitalism is that imperialism has been part and parcel of capitalism from its origins in the fifteenth century. As he put it, "Modern imperialism is inseparable from capitalism" (Rodney 1972: 143). "Ever since the fifteenth century," he contends,

Europe was in strategic command of world trade and of the legal and organizational aspects of the movement of goods between continents. Europe's power increased with imperialism, because imperialism meant investments, and investments (with or without colonial rule) gave European capitalists control over production within each continent. The amount of benefits to capitalism increased accordingly, since Europe could determine the quantity and quality of different raw material inputs which would need to be brought to get in the interests of capitalism as a whole, and of the bourgeois class in particular. (Rodney 1972: 177)

The development of Europe and underdevelopment of Africa were, for Rodney (1972: 135), a result of "a single system—that of capitalist imperialism."

### **Imperialism**

Rodney (1972: 136) defines imperialism as "capitalist expansion."<sup>8</sup> He states, "European (and North American and Japanese) capitalists were forced by the internal logic of their competitive system to seek abroad in less developed countries opportunities to control raw material supplies, to find markets, and to find profitable fields of investment." Capitalism necessitates outward expansion into new markets; hence, imperialism was part and parcel of capitalism from its origins. As capitalism expands through imperialist logics, however, it does so unevenly. Rodney found

It is essential to distinguish between *capitalist elements* and *capitalism as a total social system*. Colonialism introduced some elements of capitalism into Africa...However, colonialism did not transform Africa into a capitalist society comparable to the metropolises...capitalism in the form of colonialism failed to

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<sup>8</sup> This should not be conflated with the distinction Samir Amin makes between expansion and imperialism. While Amin (1976) contends that, "*Les concepts de centre et de périphérie sont relatifs à l'expansionnisme du capitalisme en général. Ils ne sont pas, notons-le bien, des synonymes atténués de pays impérialistes et pays coloniaux et dépendants. Ces concepts sont essentiels pour qui a dès le départ une vision non occidentalocentriste et non économiste du capitalisme*" [Trans: The concepts of center and periphery are related to the expansion of capitalism in general. They are not, attenuated synonyms for imperialist countries and the colonial and dependent countries. These concepts are essential for a vision of capitalism that is neither Eurocentric nor economic.] (Amin 1976: 115). A general tendency of capitalism is expansion, especially when one sees capitalism from a non-Eurocentric perspective. Monopoly capitalism, claims Amin, leads to "*l'exportation du capital à une échelle insoupçonnée jusq' alors*" [Trans.: the export of capital on a hitherto unthinkable scale] (Amin 1976, 116). Rodney (1972) similarly sees imperialism as "that state of affairs where European capitalist were faced with the necessity to expand in a big way outside their national economies" because they "were forced by the internal logic of their competitive systems" (Rodney 1972: 136). While perhaps Rodney's concept of imperialism might be in the genre of theories of imperialism that Amin dismisses as "*ultra-gauchistes (trotskisme, pseudo-maoïsme, anarchisme, etc.)*" [Trans: far-left (Trotskyist, pseudo-Maoist, anarchist, etc.,)] (Amin 1976: 116) because it does emphasize the export of capital which engendered unequal trade, for Rodney, like Amin, monopoly capitalism is the driving factor. Rodney, however, shows that this process had a centuries-long history, especially when seen from the African perspective.

perform in Africa the tasks which it had performed in Europe in changing social relations and liberating the forces of production. (Rodney 1972: 215, emphasis in original)

While capitalism in the Global South, Rodney shows, was articulated in a form distinct from capitalism in the metropolises, it did create, through processes of imperialism, a system that eventually subsumed the entire globe. “Imperialism was in effect the extended capitalist system,” theorized Rodney (1972: 12), “which for many years embraced the whole world—one part being the exploiters and the other the exploited, one part being dominated and the other acting as overlords, one part making policy and the other being dependent.”

Not only did capitalist imperialism create two different articulations of global capitalism but it did so through a relationship of exploitation, “namely, the exploitation of one country by another. All of the countries named as ‘underdeveloped’ in the world are exploited by others; and the underdevelopment with which the world is now preoccupied is a product of capitalist, imperialist, exploitation” (Rodney 1972: 14). Just as free-trade appears on the surface to be a horizontal relationship that upon historicizing is revealed to be dependence, underdevelopment is mistakenly seen as a fault of the “underdeveloped economy” while, “the true explanation lies in seeking out the relationship between Africa and certain developed countries and in recognizing that it is a relationship of exploitation” (Rodney 1972: 22). Just as the capitalist exploits the worker, so too does the Global North exploit the Global South. In his view “trade, colonial domination, and capitalist investment” have combined to create a dependent relationship between Global North and South; “the wealth created by African labor and from African resources was grabbed by the capitalist countries of Europe; and in the second place, restrictions were placed upon African capacity to make maximum use of its economic potential—which is what development is all about” (Rodney 1972: 25).

Rodney urges us, however, not to stop here in our theorizing of capitalist imperialism. He emphasizes that:

Colonialism was not merely a system of exploitation, but one whose essential purpose was to repatriate the profits to the so-called mother county. From an African viewpoint, that amounted to consistent expatriation of surplus produced by African labor out of African resources. It meant the development of Europe as part of the same dialectical process in which Africa was underdeveloped. (Rodney 1972: 149)

In other words, the exploitation inherent in imperialism is the expropriation of surplus from the colony to the metropole. Imperialism serves the endless accumulation of capital and is therefore central to the architecture of the capitalist world-system. “Time and time again,” writes Rodney the Global South is employed

To buttress capitalism economically and militarily, and therefore in effect forcing Africa to contribute to its own exploitation. Apart from saving capitalism in times of crisis, the dependencies had always been prolonging the life of capitalism by

taking the edge off the internal contradictions and conflicts which were a part of the capitalist system. (1972: 198-199)

Colonialism and later dependent economic relationships continue to play a central role in the historical development during periods of crisis. The Global South provides “a new lease of life to a mode of production that was otherwise dying” (Rodney 1972: 201) in the chaotic periods in between hegemony. While colonialism and dependent development ensures the continued success of global capitalism, Rodney (1972: 201) reminds us that this fact is not to be celebrated, “From every viewpoint other than that of the minority class of capitalists,” he writes, “colonialism was a monstrous institution holding back the liberation of man.”

Imperialism was not just the purview of capital, but also of the colonial state, which “engaged directly in the economic exploitation and impoverishment of Africa” (Rodney 1972: 164). Colonial governors had three functions: 1) to protect the economic interest of the colonizing country from competition; 2) to adjudicate conflicts among capitalists; 3) to produce optimal conditions for the exploitation of the colony (Rodney 1972). Colonial systems of taxation played a key role:

One of the main purposes of the colonial system of taxation was to provide requisite funds for administering the colony as a field of exploitation. European colonizers insured that Africans paid for the upkeep of the governors and police who oppressed them and served as watchdogs for private capitalists. Indeed taxes and customs duties were levied in the nineteenth century with the aim of allowing colonial powers to recover the costs of the armed forces which were dispatched to conquer Africa. In effect, therefore, the colonial governments never put a penny into the colonies. All expenses were met by exploiting the labor and natural resources of the continent. (Rodney 1972: 164-165)

As part of its role in assuring the optimal conditions for exploitation, the colonial state was a mechanism for disciplining labor for organizing and revolting (Rodney 1980). Colonial courts, Rodney claimed, were the “machinery for punishing” labor. While

A governor was the chief executive of a colonial state based on colonial capitalism; ultimately, all governors had to defend the capitalist class when it was threatened. But different officeholders had differing conceptions of how far and how quickly they should act in alliance with the employers. Occasionally, a Governor sought to stand for an “imperial trusteeship” greater than the interests of individual capitalists.” (Rodney 1980: 210-211)

The colonial state ensured the long-run functioning of capitalist imperialism and therefore did not always side with capital over labor but sought to secure the ability of colonial capitalism to continue to reap profit for years to come.

In the documentary, *In the Sky's Wild Noise* (1983), Rodney explains how the colonial state gave way, after independence, to authoritarianism across the global South by the late 1970s:

You know in society of the present time, some specific rights which had been won through struggle by the people in the colonial period are now in the process of being

eroded. One, take the most obvious, the electoral process. In Guyana, it is now, I think, widely known, inside the country and outside of the country that, first of all, the Americans intervened along with the British to thwart the democratic process from 1953 onward. And secondly, once the present government got in to power it extended the scale of electoral fraud that so that we cannot claim at the present time we are politically enfranchised people. We cannot claim to have chosen our own national government. And that is one level. Below that level you find that there is reproduced in every facet of the national life the same anti-democratic tendencies. So that there are no local government elections for instance, the local government elections are postponed every time they come due with ease, with no concern whatsoever, with no reaction. There are no elections taking place within certain trade unions where workers at that basic level should be choosing their representatives to deal with their material interests. And once that anti-democratic principle is established we see then, that step by step we move backwards. And I say backwards very deliberately. These were not rights or privileges that were handed to us by the British. The right to have your union and to have a democratic union was won through struggle in this very century. The right to have democratic elections was won only in the late 1940s and in 1953 when there was universal adult suffrage. So that these recently conquered rights are now in the process of being withheld, eroded, dissipated in one form of action. In the early years of independence or in the last years of colonialism, we had certain illusions that having inherited the formal modes of political procedure from the British that of necessity we would not follow the paths that had been followed by other Latin American territories, or by countries such as Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, and Cuba and the like. And as people begin to recognize that many of these authoritarian states and these repressive institutions, can and are emerging in our society, I feel that there is a growing awareness of the need to attempt to combat this repression. (Rodney in *The Victor Jara Collective* 1983: 4:27 to 7:30)

The state, in the period after independence, rolls back the gains that have been made during independence movements and by the late 1970s, Rodney contends, the promise of national independence was often squandered by non-democratic states and trade unions.

### **Class Struggle**

Just as capitalism was global from its origins, the class struggle was also necessarily global. “Class struggle,” writes Rodney,

Is on the international plane. That means that European, North American and Japanese capitalists stand on one side and the workers and peasants of Africa on the other. The weapons of this battle are ideological and they are “structural” in the sense that the workers, peasants and progressive petty bourgeoisie have to devise a variety of new structures that will replace the old—the national corporations to replace private firms, workers self-management to replace elitist managerial separation from the working class, Ujamaa villages to please individualist and potentially capitalist farming, self reliant schools to replace colonial institutions designed to alienate students from their peasant parents. (Rodney 1970b: 50)

While Rodney shows how imperialism served as a release valve to prevent crises of over-accumulation in the core, he contends that imperialism similarly served to diffuse the class struggle

in Europe. He details how the class struggle in Europe led capital to create a racialized reserve army of labor in the Global South:

The principal contradiction within capitalism from the onset was that between capital and the workers. To keep the system going, the capitalists had constantly to step up the rate of exploitation of their workers. At the same time, European workers were increasing mastery of the means of production in the factories and mines, and they were learning to work collectively in big enterprises and within their own trade union structures. If the bourgeoisie continued to deprive them of the major fruits of their own labor and to oppress them socially and politically, then those two classes were set on a collision path. Ever since the mid-nineteenth century, Marx had predicted class collision would come in the form of revolution in which workers would emerge victorious. The capitalists were afraid of that possibility, knowing full well that they had seized power from the feudal landlord class by means of revolution. However, imperialism introduced a new factor into this situation—one that deferred the confrontation between workers and capitalists in the metropolises. (Rodney 1972: 199)

While in Europe, wages were set at subsistence levels, in Africa, wages were significantly lower. Colonial rulers and European capital assumed African workers would grow their own food for survival (Rodney 1972).

This semi-proletarianization<sup>9</sup> was justified by racism; as Rodney (1972: 150) put it, “the racist theory that the black man was inferior led to the conclusion that he deserved lower wages; and interestingly enough, the light-skinned Arab and Berber populations of North Africa were treated as ‘blacks’ by the white racist French.” In addition to the low wages associated with semi-proletarianization, colonial states also employed forced labor. British colonies mandated a number of days per year that workers had to toil for free to carry out “public works”. Much of this labor contributed to infrastructure projects such as building roads, railways and ports (Rodney 1972). The French, for example, mandated all African men should enlist for a period of service in the French military and then used them as unpaid labor on farms and construction sites (Rodney 1972). The Belgians and Portuguese engaged forced labor in private industry in an arrangement where private companies paid the colonial state, but not workers, for their labor (Rodney 1972).

Rodney’s (1980) colonial class structure consists of, at the top, a capitalist class that owns the means of production, controls the institutions of the colonial state, and secures most of their surplus through wage labor or market mechanisms. At the bottom of the class system are slaves who in later periods became either peasants, urban workers, or “a permanent hybrid of peasant and proletarian” (Rodney 1980: 218). One cannot theorize capitalism in the Global South without class analysis, shows Rodney (1972: 118); as “economic development is a matter of increasing capacity to produce and it is tied up with patterns of land tenure and class relations.” Without a class

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<sup>9</sup> It’s important to note that Rodney developed a theory of semi-proletarianization well before Immanuel Wallerstein (Wallerstein 1983) but not before Giovanni Arrighi first theorized the semi-proletariat in an essay written in 1967 (Arrighi 1970). For an excellent analysis of how “semi-proletarianization” has been theorized in world-systems analysis see Zhan and Scully (2018).

structure rooted in the exploitation of peasants and workers, capitalist imperialism fails in its primary goal of expropriating surplus value for the metropole.

The colonial working-class struggle, in Rodney's view, is rooted in the joint, yet contradictory tendencies toward struggle and accommodation. The day-to-day life of the colonized worker, shows Rodney (1980), is characterized by both struggle and accommodation; struggle in applying their labor to either earn wages or grow food for subsistence, and accommodation in surviving a system in which power is monopolized by the capitalist class, landowners, and the state. Rodney explains that while some workers resisted more than others and some workers were more accommodating of capital than others, one cannot think of individual workers as always compromising or always resisting; each historical conjuncture is characterized by both resistance and accommodation. Rodney, very interestingly, however, endows resistance as the principal motor of conjunctural labor history in the colonial context. The slave and the colonial waged laborer, Rodney (1980: 151) writes, "was never comfortable;" and therefore engaged in "rebellion and revolt." In the Guyanese context particularly, Rodney (1980) shows how this dialectic of accommodation and resistance was used to characterize Black workers and slaves as rebellious and Brown workers and indentured labor as docile. Yet, shows Rodney, this facade of docility was simply rhetoric of the colonial state, as indentured laborers widely engaged in Brechtian forms of labor resistance such as absenteeism, restlessness, noncompliance, and sporadic acts of violence, what James Scott (1985) would later call "weapons of the weak".

Semi-proletarianization and racism "made it extremely difficult for African workers to organize themselves. It is only the organization and resoluteness of the working class which protects it from the natural tendencies of the capitalist class to exploit to the utmost. That is why in all colonial territories, when African workers realized the necessity for trade union solidarity, numerous obstacles were placed in their path by colonial regimes" (Rodney 1972: 150). As a result of limitations in engaging in labor unrest, Rodney (1980: 163) explained that, "the class struggle had to be fought with whatever limited weapons were in the hands of the working class. Its principal characteristic was still spontaneity." But these limitations did little in terms of minimizing worker solidarity across the colonial world. The colonial class struggle was necessarily global as workers across different European empires were "in a position to recognize its affinities with labor elsewhere" (Rodney 1980: 165). Or as Rodney (1972: 10) wrote in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, "Above all, capitalism has intensified its own political contradictions in trying to subjugate nations and continents outside of Europe, so that workers and peasants in every part of the globe have become self-conscious and determined to take their destiny into their own hands"

The colonial class struggle cannot be disentangled from the question of race. Shaped by the Guyanese context in which the working class was comprised of two different racial-ethnic categories of what Rodney (1980: 174, emphasis added) termed "involuntary immigrants," he observed that while Afro- and Indo-Guyanese workers' interests as colonized workers forced to resettle in Guyana to labor were often one and the same, at times group interests diverged, but "more important still was their own *conviction* that their interests conflicted." After the abolition

of slavery, Afro-Guyanese workers opposed the indentured labor program because Afro-Guyanese workers rightfully identified that Indian indenture would reduce Black employment levels, lower wages, and increase costs of living in Guyana. And taxes were increased in order to assist the British in transporting indentured labor from India to Guyana, thereby forcing Black workers to pay for the indentured laborers who would reduce Black employment levels, lower wages, and increase costs of living (Rodney 1980). This conflict, instead of directed at the colonial state, was often articulated as a racial confrontation between Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese workers.

In his assessment of this conflict, Rodney (1980) rules out culture as an explanation for hostility between ethnic groups as he shows that by the 1880s and 90s both Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese workers had little memory of Africa or India except what they had been told by older relatives or read about their place of ancestry, so began to see themselves as belonging to the land on which they lived and worked. Furthermore, Guyanese workers of both Indian and African descent began to adopt each other's culture and customs, developing a hybrid of multiple cultures. However, that is not to say that conflict between the two groups ceased, as Rodney shows, ethnic stereotypes persisted and continued to divide Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese workers. However, Rodney (1980: 181) argues, this division was not based in cultural realities of turn of the century Guyana, but instead rooted in "planter propaganda" that stoked ethnic divisions and kept stereotypes alive in order to divide and rule. This planter strategy of divide and rule was not simply reserved for racial-ethnic categories but also invoked to divide Hindus, Muslims, and Christians; and to divide Indo-Guyanese workers whose origins were in Madras Presidency from Indo-Guyanese workers with origins in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, or Bengal. Rodney (1980: 186) writes that planters devised many ways to prevent unity among the Guyanese working class not just those based in racial-ethnic identity, but that "disputes were always potentially more explosive when racial identification was involved" so it was a strategy planters often relied on to prevent labor disputes and uprisings.

Divide and rule was not only enacted through the creation and reinforcement of ethnic stereotypes but also at the point of production. Different roles within the colonial division of labor were given to Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese workers. For example, Black labor was employed in the factories but Indian labor was employed in the fields (except for cane cutting). This division of labor allowed both planters and the state to develop a racial stereotype of Black labor as more rebellious than Indian labor as most strikes and labor unrest began on the factory floor where mostly Black workers were employed (Rodney 1980). Indian labor was also often used as strikebreakers for such factory floor strikes (Rodney 1980). Rodney (1980: 212) called this a "classic technique of using Indians to police Africans and vice versa." While race and culture divided the working classes, exacerbated by a racialized division of labor and residential segregation, "racial conflict was far less pronounced than might have been expected from the manner in which the two main races were thrown into economic competition" (Rodney 1980: 219).

By the turn of the 20th century, it became more common in Guyana for African and Indian workers to strike together. The colonial state abetted planters by "deliberately withholding information" of the unity strikers showed by granting either higher wages for Black people or

higher wages for Indians but not for all striking workers (Rodney 1980). In most cases, wage claims were denied to Indian workers to dissuade the group that the colonial state saw as more accommodating from demanding further concessions and engaging in future labor unrest (Rodney 1980). Rodney found a discrepancy in the historical record in that publicly British Governors of Guyana blamed labor unrest on Black workers while privately admitting that, “the East Indian immigrant is equally as interested as other laborers in any demand for higher wages” (Rodney 1980: 213). This evidence strongly suggests that the British colonial state, following the planter class, pitted workers against each other in order to prevent them from organizing, striking, and obtaining concessions from capital and the colonial state. In *A History of the Guyanese Working People* (1980), Rodney looks to the comparative Caribbean context, and sees similar dynamics across the region, but contends that the case most closely mirroring his analysis of the class struggle in Guyana is the labor struggle in Barbados.

### **Race and Capitalism**

Inbuilt into Rodney’s (1972: 10) theory of global political economy is the notion that historical capitalism produced specific racial hierarchies. “Capitalism,” he writes, “has created its own irrationalities such as a vicious white racism.” He contends that these “white racist notions,” furthermore, “are so deep-rooted within capitalist society” (Rodney 1972: 219). The racial hierarchies Rodney (1972: 90) identifies are a result of capitalist imperialism but also reinforce and deepen processes of capitalist imperialism. “Racism, violence, and brutality were the concomitants of the capitalist system,” theorizes Rodney.

Economic exploitation engendered the development of racism. In *Groundings* (1969: 25) Rodney writes that “slavery in the West Indies started as an economic phenomenon rather than a racial one. But it rapidly became racist as all white labor was withdrawn from the fields, leaving Black to be identified with slave labor and white to be linked with property and domination.” The exploitation of Black labor, Rodney contends, led to the construction of racism. In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), Rodney makes the similar claim, that

Europeans at home and abroad found it necessary to rationalize that exploitation in racist terms as well. Oppression follows logically from exploitation, so as to guarantee the latter. Oppression of African people on purely racial grounds accompanied, strengthened, and became indistinguishable from oppression for economic reasons. (Rodney 1972: 89)

In slight contrast to his mentor CLR James, in Rodney’s framework imperialism led to the development of racism, and not as James (1963: 283) contends that “to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental.” For James (1963), there is a symbiotic relationship between race and imperialism but for Rodney, first imperialism engendered racism after which time, race and imperialism formed a dialectal relationship.

Race is so foundational to the historical development of capitalism because Rodney grounds capitalism in the political economy of imperialism, which, as stated before, he contends has *always* been part and parcel of the capitalist world-system from its origins in the fifteenth century. Rodney begins to develop his theory of racism as foundational to capitalist imperialism in *Groundings* (1969) where he writes, “That association of wealth with whites and poverty with blacks is not accidental. It is the nature of the imperialist relationship that enriches the metropolis at the expense of the colony, i.e. it makes the whites richer and the blacks poorer.” (Rodney 1969: 19). Racism as a tool of imperialism is further theorized in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Rodney 1972). Rodney details how racism began as a result of the economic interests of European capitalists and states, but over time evolved into its own logic of oppression:

Pervasive and vicious racism was present in imperialism as a variant independent of the economic rationality that initially gave birth to racism. It was economics that determined that Europe should invest in Africa and control the continent’s raw materials and labor. It was racism which confirmed the decision that the form of control should be direct colonial rule. (Rodney 1972: 141)

Capitalist imperialism relies on racism as ideological justification for indefinite dependence as colonial officials “consciously plan the exploitation of resources right into the next century, aiming at racist domination of the black people of Africa until the end of time” (Rodney 1972: 176).

The praxis of Rodney’s theory was clear, even in his first book. He stated, “Black power means...break with imperialism” (Rodney 1969: 28). So not only was racism foundational to capitalist imperialism, but Black liberation could only come about by eradicating European imperialism and the lingering remnants of its institutions, processes, and hierarchies.

### Conclusions

While world-systems analysis has long recognized the importance of imperialism and class struggle as central to the historical development of capitalism, in this essay I have presented Rodney’s concept of “capitalist imperialism” to show how Rodney’s theoretical work, when put in conversation with the early work of other world-systems analysis founders, can bring theories of anti-imperialism back to the fore of world-systems analysis. Rodney’s theory of capitalist imperialism further historicizes and refines the important work the founding fathers of world-systems analysis did on imperialism and anti-imperialism and Rodney should be given his rightful place in that cannon. But while Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, Andre Gunder Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein largely accept Lenin’s periodization of imperialism, and in so doing, Lenin’s assertion that imperialism is a product of the 19th century tied to finance capital, which then becomes a definitive feature of the world capitalist system but not the same as capitalism; Rodney’s global and *longue durée* theory of imperialism based on empirical research in Africa and the Caribbean, in contrast, shows that capitalism and imperialism emerged in the same historical moment as synchronous processes of historical capitalism.

Rodney further historicizes Leninist and Maoist concepts of global imperialism and levies these reformulated concepts to build stronger anti-capitalist praxis rooted in dialectical materialism and class struggle approaches to social science history. While Rodney at times disambiguates his theory of capitalism from his theory of imperialism, Rodney, like Frank (1978), saw capitalism as imperialist *from its origins* in the fifteenth century. While Frank focuses on how the colonization of the Americas led to primitive accumulation in Europe (Frank 1978), Rodney, in choosing a different regional focus, explicitly links his concept of capitalist imperialism (also beginning in the fifteenth century and also tied to primitive accumulation in Europe), to the construction of race, racism, and anti-Blackness. Altogether, the theories of imperialism posited by earlier world-systems analysts (Amin 1976; Arrighi 1978; Frank 1978; Wallerstein 1984) provide important insights into the critical role imperialism played in the transition to capitalism and in early systemic cycles of accumulation. While Rodney's empirical scholarship focuses on capitalist imperialism in shaping the political economy of Africa and parts of the Caribbean, it can easily be applied to a more global analysis of the transition to capitalism.

While Rodney's major empirical scholarship analyzes the pre-colonial and colonial period, one can see through various essays and interviews that his praxis was rooted in interpreting the past in order to eradicate capitalist imperial remnants in the contemporary period. He said; "my consciousness of West Indian society was not that we needed to fight the British but that we needed to fight the British, the Americans, and their indigenous lackeys. That I see as an anti-neo-colonial consciousness as distinct from a purely anti-colonial consciousness" (Rodney, quoted in Hill 1990: 34). His work, as he states, is not just anti-colonial but anti-*neo*-colonial in that his scholarship reveals, through Marxist historiography, old social formations associated with capitalist imperialism revived, albeit repackaged and intensified, in the period of flag independence.

By looking back to Rodney and other left anti-imperialist thought that played an important role in the Dar es Salaam School and early articulations of world-systems analysis, we can recenter imperialism within our analysis of world-historical capitalism. In this examination of four theoretical themes of Rodney's work—capitalism, imperialism, class struggle, and race and capitalism—I have shown how the Rodneyan concept of "capitalist imperialism" centers a theory of imperialism within the historical development of capitalism. In recovering world-systems analysis' intellectual roots in Dar es Salaam and reviving the concept of capitalist imperialism in our description of the historical development of global capitalism, there is potential to both revitalize the discussion on anti-imperialism within world-systems analysis and better theorize anti-imperialism in the service of contemporary struggles across the globe. As Walter Rodney (1974: 40-41) said, "the goal of our international activity...is to develop a perspective that is anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and that speaks to the exploitation and oppression of all people." Through recovering the historiographical methods, pedagogy, theories, and praxis of the Dar es Salaam School, along with revisiting the earlier work of world-systems analysis' founding fathers, world-systems analysis can craft a dialectical and explicitly left anti-imperialism rooted in class struggle.

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