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Settler Colonialism as a Structure?

Reflections on Settler Colonial Discourse and Expert Responses

CONTENT

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Introduction

Jeremia Pelgrom & Clemens Six

Ever since the publication of Patrick Wolfe's seminal paper on settler colonialism's logic of elimination, historians have debated with new vigour what settler colonialism is, when and why it originally emerged, and how it has shaped the world we live in today. Among other things, this growing historical interest resulted in the evolution of a distinct research field on settler colonialism with its own specialised journal and numerous publications on a wide range of case studies across different time periods and geographical regions. Arguably, the most striking characteristic of this emerging field is its structural approach, which recognises settlers as a distinct analytical category that operates according to agendas different from those of colonial powers based in the metropole. This approach not only serves to distinguish various colonial modes of operation, but its structural perspective also holds the potential to reveal the underlying forces and patterns driving settler colonial expansion. On the other hand, critics have pointed out the limitations of this approach, particularly its emphasis on colonial agents, which tends to overlook indigenous agency and empowerment in these processes. The suggestion of a single, unifying logic driving this phenomenon across various historical and geographical contexts has also been challenged, along with the rigid distinction between settler and exploitative colonial modes.

This publication emerges from a workshop held at the Royal Netherlands Institute (KNIR) in Rome in June 2024 organized in the contexts of the *Settler Colonial Paradigms* research program. It brings together a group of scholars from the Research Centre for Historical Studies at University of Groningen, who, as relative outsiders to the field, were invited to engage with this topical discourse from their own disciplinary perspectives. They present historiographical reflections on whether settler colonialism can be understood as a structure and how such an interpretation might enrich our historical understanding by offering a long-term perspective. The contributors cover a wide range of cases from the roots of settler colonialism in the ancient Mediterranean world to contemporary utopias about settling on Mars. The common goal of these contributions is to raise new questions and potentially examine case studies that specialists in the field have either overlooked or analysed from different angles. More specifically, they ask whether a structural approach does indeed allow us to identify core elements that characterised settler colonialism through the ages and across continents; what

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distinguishes settler colonialism from other manifestations of colonialism; what the role of (access to) land was; which other socio-economic, cultural, and political-ideological factors can possibly explain settler colonialism; and what the relevance of this concept is to analyse and understand contemporary international and local relations around the globe?

In keeping with the dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of the discourse, these contributions are presented as reflections rather than fully polished academic papers. They feature light referencing and make no claim to exhaustive bibliographies or complete mastery of the topic. Instead, they represent responses from informed outsiders to the discourse, intended to spark further discussion by introducing fresh perspectives and expertise. The result is a mosaic of concise case studies that highlight two key points: settler colonialism is a complex, multi-layered concept that fuels thought-provoking debates on political, socio-economic, and cultural displacement throughout history; and the need for a comparative, global, and long-term analysis to precisely identify the structural elements driving this phenomenon and determine its potential connection to Modernity.

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The Ancient Roots of Settler Colonialism

Jeremia Pelgrom

The discourse on settler colonialism has largely been shaped by historians of the modern era, with a strong emphasis on Western colonial practices. While this perspective has provided valuable insights into the phenomenon's influence on the modern geopolitical order, its narrow scope limits a more comprehensive understanding of settler colonialism as a broader historical process (exceptions include Kiernan 2007; Cavanagh and Veracini 2017). This is particularly evident in the field's efforts to uncover the deeper underlying factors driving the so-called "logic of elimination" of indigenous populations within settler colonialism (Wolfe 2006). Prominent scholars have connected the emergence of this destructive structure to defining elements of Modernity, such as capitalism, class struggle, nationalism, and Enlightenment philosophy—thereby suggesting that it is a product of a specific historical context (e.g. Wolfe 2006; Mamdani 2020).

To an ancient historian, the emphasis on (early) modern European history is unsatisfying, as many aspects of modern settler colonialism strongly align with phenomena familiar to the ancient world. This suggests that the quest to unravel the roots of this structure cannot be limited to an analysis of Western colonialism in the modern era; instead, it must embrace a global historical approach and, more importantly for this essay, a long-term perspective (Levine and Marriott 2012). A deep historical approach would not only offer more examples and contexts to examine but also provide a stronger foundation for addressing one of the key underlying questions in this field: whether all human migrations into new territories inherently have the potential to lead to eliminatory projects, or whether such outcomes arise only under specific colonial configurations, societal conditions, or ideological contexts.

The ancient world, in particular, offers a valuable lens for exploring this question, given the diverse colonial forms it produced, only some of which appear to have resulted in systematic eliminatory policies. This diversity presents a unique opportunity to investigate the specific factors that drive such destructive colonial logics. While there is extensive scholarship on colonization and its effects on indigenous societies in antiquity, a comprehensive structural analysis of the dynamics behind colonial elimination practices—and why they are particularly prominent in some cases but less so in others—remains largely absent. Notably, one of the few direct attempts to tackle this issue dates back to the early 16th century, offering some intriguing ideas that merit further exploration. In his Discourses on Livy, Macchiavelli examines the question why people leave their homelands and invade the

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territories of others (Macchiavelli 1531, 2.8). Within this discussion, he also proposes an intriguing theory about why certain forms of expansion lead to mass-elimination while others do not. In his analysis, he compares the Gallic invasion of Italy with Roman imperial expansion, contending that they led to significantly different levels of violence and displacement, with the Gallic model clearly representing the most extreme case.

Machiavelli's theory on the logic of elimination

Machiavelli's primary insight is that the logic of indigenous population elimination is fundamentally influenced by the differing motivations behind territorial invasions. According to his analysis, *ambition* leads to expansion without a logic of elimination, while *necessity* results in the mass displacement and elimination of populations. The reason for this difference, in his view, is that ambition is fulfilled when the conquered people acknowledge their subordinate status and submit to the will of the new power, whereas expansion driven by necessity only achieves its goal if the native population is removed from the targeted land. While this differentiation somewhat corresponds with the modern scholarly convention of distinguishing between exploitative colonialism and settler colonialism (Veracini 2011 and Osterhammel 2002 for a more refined typology), there is an important difference. Macchiavelli, with his example, seems to suggest that expansion in imperial contexts, like the Roman Empire are exclusively driven by ambition, while necessity motivated expansion, such as the Gallic invasions, operated outside an official institutional context.

Furthermore, Machiavelli not only proposes that factors such as poverty and demographic pressure trigger this destructive force, but also highlights relative differences in living conditions. He suggests that the warm and abundant Mediterranean lands serve as constant pull factors. Analogous to an inverted thermodynamic law, people are naturally drawn to warmer and presumably more comfortable living conditions. According to this perspective, the structure of settler colonization is thus also shaped by inequalities in the expected standard of living. Lastly, Machiavelli underscores the significance of scale: the structure of elimination can only be activated if a sufficient number of people migrate collectively. Intriguingly, he suggests that migrating communities that lack the power to replace indigenous populations adopt cooperation strategies, but nonetheless are inherently part of the replacement structure, remaining dormant until circumstances allow them to act.

Are Mass-migrations a Form of Settler Colonialism?

While Machiavelli's theory is certainly intriguing, it has clear shortcomings, particularly due to its evident bias in evaluating Roman imperialism. His suggestion of less violent Roman invasion strategies

is not supported by literary sources, including Livy, who frequently documents Roman colonial elimination campaigns (cf. below). However, his analysis of mass-migration movements, such as those of the Gauls, raises an intriguing question: can these phenomena be considered examples of settler colonialism? Answering this question meaningfully would require formal criteria for defining settler colonialism—an issue not yet fully addressed in current scholarship. Most modern studies either overlook this form of settlement invasion or distinguish it from colonization, arguing that it does not leave behind a controlling center of expansion or does not create separate political units in the case of frontier expansion (Osterhammel, 2002, 4-10). However, if the aim is to understand the dynamics that lead to elimination practices in resettlement contexts, examining these mass-migration cases may still prove valuable.

While the details of ancient mass-migrations remain unclear, recent studies suggest they were more replacive than previously thought. Traditional scholarship assumed these migrations led to hybrid cultures by blending migrating peoples, often considered minorities, with indigenous populations. However, genetic research is challenging this view. Ancient DNA analyses reveal significant shifts in genetic makeup, showing that existing populations and cultures were absorbed far less than once believed. The early Bronze Age Yamnaya culture, for instance, replaced languages, cultures, and genetic populations in Europe, with only a small portion of the original population surviving, probably through the incorporation of local women (Haak et al. 2015; Furholt 2018; for critical views Klejn 2017; Balanovsky 2017). Similar patterns are seen in later migrations into the Mediterranean, though the extent of replacement and its mechanisms remain debated. Despite fragmented and contested evidence, a growing consensus suggests these migrations were more replacive than once thought, aligning with elements of the settler colonial logic of elimination paradigm.

Arguably, the most important difference between these early examples of mass-migration and modern settler colonial case-studies is not so much the extent of elimination, but the institutional context. While modern settler colonialism occurred within an imperial framework, leveraging an asymmetrical power system armoured by legal, ideological and military instruments, these early examples occurred in more anarchic conditions. Especially Wolfe, emphasizes the importance of this imperial context and juridical and ideological tool-kit for settler colonial structure (Wolfe 2006). While we should not overemphasize the importance of these institutional-imperial instruments in modern settler colonialism, as much of this happened in rather anarchic conditions too, this is an important difference. In any case, it seems reasonable to distinguish between these two scenarios of replacive settler migration. Perhaps we can use the term *Settler Colonization* as a more general term that encompasses both phenomena, while *Settler Colonialism* refers only to the latter variant, as the term colonialism entails a system of domination accompanied by an ideology and legal system of control.

If it is plausible that *Settler Colonization* is a very ancient phenomenon that certainly predates Modernity, the two logical follow-up questions are whether *Settler Colonialism* is an ancient phenomenon too, and, arguably more importantly, what factors have triggered the development of such practice and its associated logic of elimination. Again, here the problem of establishing the precise criteria for what thresholds define settler colonialism, complicates any analysis. However, while such a formal approach is currently out of reach, it is possible to highlight some striking parallels between aspects of settler colonialism structure distinguished in modern colonialism and practices and mentalities recorded for the ancient world.

Settler colonial logic of elimination in Antiquity

Ancient sources often recount instances of settler communities attempting to completely annihilate indigenous populations (Dougherty 1993, 31–44). This tradition of narrating colonial violence dates back to at least the 7th century BCE (e.g., Mimnermus of Smyrna, fr. 9 IEG, cited in Strabo, Geography 14.1.4) and becomes particularly prominent in Classical period literature (5th–4th century BCE). These texts frequently narrate earlier colonial campaigns from the Dark Ages and Archaic period (9th-6th century BCE), describing the total elimination or expulsion of local populations (e.g., Thucydides 6.3.2; Diodorus Siculus 11.76.3). A similar surge in elimination motives can be found in the literature of the Late Republican and Early Imperial period (1st century BCE - 1st century CE), which discusses both contemporary and earlier colonial campaigns (Roselaar 2010; Jewell 2019).

While these narratives suggest parallels between ancient and modern settler colonial practices, their accuracy is debated in current scholarship. Scholars question whether they depict actual historical events or are instead literary tropes rooted in propaganda traditions dating back to the Bronze Age, designed to exaggerate the scale and impact of colonization and conquest to reinforce power claims and elevate the victors' prestige. For the earlier phases of ancient colonial history (9th–6th century BCE), recent archaeological research has not substantiated these replacement narratives. Instead, it suggests that these early settlements adopted coexistence models, marked by limited conflict and minimal displacement (Osborne 1998; Crielaard & Burgers, 2012). This aligns with their modest demographic size—often numbering only a few hundred settlers, insufficient to dominate vast territories—and their lack of imperial support structures. Furthermore, the motivations for establishing these colonial settlements, as described in the sources, align more with necessity-driven colonization than with the structures characteristic of settler colonialism. Their foundations are depicted as responses to urgent challenges, such as fleeing famine or socio-political instability, and took place without the support of an imperial framework (Garland 2014, 34–38).

Yet, the sources also highlight an emancipatory dimension, as colonists set out with the promise of equality—receiving equal land allotments and political rights—opportunities that were often unattainable in their homelands (Malkin & Blok 2024). Colonial settlements in this period were mostly conceived as new, sovereign polities, independent both from the mother city and from the local populations whose lands they settled. This vision carried a utopian quality, resembling modern settler colonial social experiments in its aspiration for a fresh start and social reorganization. The focus on sovereignty and land offers a clear context in which these settlements could evolve into elimination projects. When the ambition for sovereignty is obstructed by the presence of indigenous populations, it may trigger violence and practices of replacement.

While archaeological evidence indicates that these settlements initially adopted cooperative strategies and had limited impact on the colonized territories and their populations, there is also evidence suggesting that over time many of these settlements expanded significantly, leading to conflicts and campaigns of elimination against the surrounding native populations (cf. below). In this regard, and perhaps similarly to the colonial settlements of the European Age of Exploration (1500-1650), these small-scale early settlements—though founded on a very different logic—eventually evolved into critical entry points and centers of knowledge in foreign territories, playing significant roles in later colonial developments that did result in processes of indigenous replacement and elimination. Moreover, the political culture that emerged in these early settlements, centered on promises of equality and land, fostered an environment where subsequent expansion could easily fuel practices of elimination.

This shift toward colonial practices more closely resembling modern settler colonialism can be roughly dated to the 6th and 2nd centuries BCE (Osborne 1998; Wilson 2006; Zuchtreigel 2018, 1-33) and coincides with a broader transformation in Mediterranean power structures, marked by popular movements challenging aristocratic dominance, which led to political and legal advancements for the middle and lower classes, as well as new interpretations of citizenship rights (Hammer 2015; Filonik et al. 2023). The militarization of these classes played a central role in expanding their political influence, contributing to the rise of participatory political systems or, through military clientelism, the emergence of strongman politicians. Amid an evolving ideology that linked political power and citizenship to land ownership, social emancipation became increasingly dependent on land redistribution programs, either within the homeland or through territorial expansion. In this context of rising territorial imperialism, ancient colonization underwent a fundamental transformation, shifting from a trade-focused model of small, independent coastal settlements to one targeting inland territories (Terrenato 2019, 73-108). This new model involved large populations and was closely tied to strategies of territorial control, expansion, and elimination (Zuchtreigel 2018, 1-33).

Current scholarship, however, does not offer a clear understanding of the extent to which this new colonial structure affected indigenous populations or whether it aligns with the criteria for identifying a logic of elimination. While most scholars assume it resulted in significant displacement or elimination, a revisionist view argues that it was primarily characterized by exploitative or even cooperative forms of domination (Bradley 2006; Terrenato 2019). This issue remains unresolved due to the lack of convincing quantitative data or methods to assess the impact of this new colonial model on indigenous population survival rates. Nevertheless, although the precise nature of elimination in ancient colonialism during this period cannot be fully reconstructed, it is clear that this era saw the development of a distinct colonial ideology, in which notions of elimination and replacement played a prominent role. More importantly, our sources offer valuable insights into the dynamics that shaped the development of this ideology and its practices, which are relevant to the broader study of settler colonialism.

Factors that triggered settler colonialism structures in Antiquity

The factors driving the change in colonial strategies in antiquity leading to more eliminatory practices are seldom explicitly detailed in literary sources, though occasional glimpses can be found. A notable example is the Greek colony of Cyrene, founded on the coast of present-day Libya in 631 BCE, for which relatively detailed accounts have survived. Initially, Cyrene was established as a modest settlement reliant on the goodwill of local powers and skilful negotiation for its survival. Over time, however, it evolved into a major hub for successive waves of colonial settlers from the Greek mainland, who increasingly dismantled indigenous structures and killed or displaced local populations (Herodotus 4.150–165). Importantly, Herodotus provides a key insight into the causes of this shift: the outbreak of violence seems to have been driven by socio-political dynamics in mainland Greece, which prompted mass-migration to Cyrene. This influx resulted in large-scale land annexation and redistribution, which sparked internal tensions and ultimately paved the way for Cyrene's transition from a monarchy to a democratic state. (Cecchet 2017; Malkin 2023). Similar patterns emerge elsewhere. For instance, in the colony of Heracleia in Pontus, radical land redistribution initiatives and the establishment of asymmetric legal and property regimes coincided with a period of intense social unrest and the rise of a populist tyranny (Burnstein 1976; Mandel 1988). This shift disrupted previously peaceful coexistence with indigenous populations, leading to conflict. Further evidence of this correlation can be found in Metapontion, where land division systems are plausibly linked to tyrannical rule (Carter 2006). These cases illustrate a pattern where land redistribution and the rise of participatory or populist regimes often led to violent conflicts with indigenous communities. Initially dependent on indigenous support, early

colonial settlements grew with incoming settlers, driven by demographic changes and political reforms, ultimately escalating tensions and resulting in land redistribution and eliminatory campaigns.

The structure of settler colonialism was not limited to developments within the colonies but was closely linked to dynamics in the imperial metropoles. Colonization during this period seems to have been deeply influenced by social pressures in these metropoles, driven by emerging emancipatory ideologies and imperial ambitions. Since emancipation depended on access to land and resources, it required either property redistribution or territorial expansion. Unsurprisingly, aristocrats typically favoured the latter, making warfare and territorial expansion central to participatory political systems. However, supporting land redistribution programs could also serve as a strategic move by ambitious elites to gain the support of the plebs, thereby enhancing their political standing. The dynamics driven by emancipatory agendas thus introduced chronic internal tensions, as the failure to address land demands could ignite populist movements calling for redistribution, ultimately threatening aristocratic power and property. To alleviate such potentially destabilizing pressures, aristocrats frequently turned to colonization as a means of diverting social unrest and preserving stability at home (for the modern world see Veracini 2021).

Interesting perspectives on this structural tension and the need for societies to build in "safety valve" strategies to reduce social tension survive especially in philosophical treatises. For example, Plato in his Laws portrays settler colonization as a mild form of civic purging, contrasting it with the harsher alternative of execution. He writes: "When, owing to scarcity of food, people are in want, and display a readiness to follow their leaders in an attack on the property of the wealthy,—then the lawgiver, regarding all such as a plague inherent in the body politic, ships them abroad as gently as possible, giving the euphemistic title of 'emigration' to their evacuation." (Laws 5.735c–d). Similarly, Isocrates, in his advice to Philip II, warns against the dangers posed by potentially unruly mobs, particularly discharged soldiers. He suggests settling them in newly founded colonies, which would serve a dual purpose: alleviating the threat of social unrest and revolution by removing these individuals from the heart of the empire, while simultaneously strengthening the imperial frontier (To Philip, 120–123, c. 342 BCE).

In the Roman context, similar patterns emerge, with colonial land redistribution programs often coinciding with periods of intense social conflict between patricians and plebeians, frequently culminating in policies of elimination (cf. Livy 4.47–4.51; Dion. Hal. 7.13–14). Especially the texts from the Late Republican and early Imperial periods are filled with purging metaphors that reflect elite fears of rising populism, mob movements, and demands for redistribution (Jewell 2019). These sources clearly portray settler colonization as a mechanism to mitigate such threats, while also suggesting it

played a central role in campaigns of elimination against indigenous populations (see for critical views Bradley 2006 and Patterson 2006).

A compelling example comes from Polybius (2nd century BCE). In contrast to Machiavelli's depiction of relatively restrained Roman expansion, Polybius recounts how Romans killed or displaced large numbers of Gauls to establish colonies in the Picenum region. The situation escalated a generation later under the populist leader Gaius Flaminius, who proposed to divide the entire territory among Roman citizens. This redistribution prompted the Gauls to declare war, perceiving the Romans' actions not as a bid for supremacy or sovereignty but as a campaign for their complete displacement and extermination (Polybius 2.19–21).

While these narratives often focus on the Roman state and the military as the primary agents of these clearing campaigns, these sources highlight that such campaigns were often initiated at the request of the plebs, rather than by the ruling elites. A telling example of this is the extermination of the people of Sora (4th century BCE), which happened after this Italic people had attacked Roman colonists in their former territory. Livy tells us that Rome sent out a retaliation campaign and that: "All those taken to Rome were scourged and beheaded to the great satisfaction of the plebs, who felt it to be a matter of supreme importance that those who had been sent out in such large numbers as colonists should be safe wherever they were" (Livy 9.24), and later on we read about the Roman people demanding the annihilation of the Aequi after another act of betrayal: "Within a fortnight they [the Romans] had stormed and captured thirty-one walled towns. Most of these were sacked and burned, and the nation of the Aequi was almost exterminated" (Livy 9.45).

Further echoing elements of modern settler colonial structures is the emphasis on large-scale land division and agriculture as the primary means of seizing indigenous territories, utilizing asymmetric property systems and occupation rights. Agriculture in Roman colonial contexts is viewed not only as a means of sustenance for settlers but also as a moral justification for claiming land, presenting it often as unused and therefore open to occupation. Additionally, agriculture is seen as a way to transform idle or "unproductive" people into useful citizen-soldiers (Pelgrom and Stek 2014; Pelgrom 2018). In this regard, settler colonialism acts as a form of social engineering, transforming 'undesirable' groups into useful elements in a cost-effective manner (Cassius Dio 38.1).

Finally, while the sources generally lack compassion for the fate of indigenous populations affected by this structure, later texts reveal a form of nostalgia, hinting at a longing for these disappearing cultures (e.g., Strabo, Geography 6.1.2-3; Emperor Claudius' lost work Tyrrhenika). This mirrors patterns observed in modern settler colonial contexts, where such sentiments arise during periods when indigenous territorial claims no longer challenge settler sovereignty. At these times, settler

colonial states often incorporate elements of indigeneity into their own identities to distinguish themselves from other states and strengthen their connection to the lands they occupy (Wolfe 2006).

To summarize, the ancient texts reveal a structure in which settler colonialism and its eliminatory logic emerge from the interaction between emancipatory forces advocating for equality and political freedom, grounded in agricultural property systems, and conservative aristocratic strategies aimed at channelling these forces toward frontier territories. This dynamic is driven by the rising political influence of urban lower-class populations, which threatens the aristocracy's control over power structures and mechanisms of property acquisition. To alleviate this pressure, a system develops to redirect these populations from the metropole with promises of a better life in settler colonies, simultaneously strengthening the empire's frontiers in a cost-effective manner. This process frequently culminates in elimination campaigns targeting those who obstruct the realization of these promises. Viewed this way, settler colonialism represents an emancipatory project for lower classes, achieved only at the expense of others.

However, the elite strategy of removing undesirable groups by offering promises of improvement and freedom could backfire, as it inadvertently nurtured the growth of liberal ideas and practices within colonial contexts. Colonization, in this sense, became a breeding ground for emancipatory ideologies, further fostering ideals of egalitarianism and political freedom. Once established and thriving, these colonial settlements, as examples of alternative socio-political models, had the potential to inspire and strengthen revolutionary political and social movements in the mother country (Malkin 2005, for such dynamic shaping the modern world see Dahl 2018).

Final reflections

An underlying question, which also intrigued ancient scholars, is why this structure—grounded in emancipatory forces and the pursuit of freedom—developed in some societies while these qualities seemed absent in others. This issue was particularly explored in the context of the Greco-Persian Wars, where the peoples of the Achaemenid Empire were often depicted as lacking such aspirations (Raaflaub 2004). While the accuracy of this depiction is questionable, it is notable that the Greek world fostered a sense of exceptionalism based on a perceived greater capacity for individuals to control their own destiny. This culture of freedom, as it has been described (Meier 2009), became a core element of Greek societal ideology and influenced their alleged cultural heirs, such as the Romans. Ancient explanations for this drive for freedom often pointed to geography and climate. The fragmented landscapes and micro-ecosystems of the Mediterranean, coupled with moderate temperatures, were believed to nurture independence, while vast, open, and warmer regions with uniformity of the seasons, were thought to promote submissiveness (Hippocrates, *De aere aquis et locis*, XVI; Aristotle, Pol. 7.7). Cold climates,

in this paradigm, were considered to foster a strong spirit of freedom but were deemed unsuitable for establishing stable societies and enduring political structures due to harsh living conditions, which often prompted migrations to more temperate regions.

This geographic explanation, with its racial undertones, does not resonate with most modern readers. However, contemporary scholarship continues to debate the origins of the so-called culture of freedom and whether it was truly a defining characteristic of Greek culture. One prominent line of inquiry connects the development of such ideals to early colonial experiences or the narratives about colonial adventures (Malkin 1998; 2011). It is perhaps no coincidence that societies known for participatory political systems and settler colonial structures—such as the Greeks, Carthaginians, and Romans—share deeply ingrained migratory origin myths. Typically, these cultures often trace their origins to an act of colonization rooted in deep, mythical history. The notable exception, perhaps, is Athens, which claimed autochthonous origins but nonetheless incorporated colonial narratives into its mythology, particularly regarding its role in the so-called Ionian migration.

These myths typically involve a population displaced by famine, warfare, or political strife, embarking on a journey in search of a new beginning. Particularly interesting in the light of Machiavelli's theory, is that several early Greek colonial narratives, such as Return of the Heracleidae or the Doric invasion myth, reflect an ancient belief that the origins of many Greek polities lay in migratory movements from northern regions like the Balkans or the Caspian steppe to the more temperate Mediterranean areas of modern-day Greece, connecting them to the necessity driven mass-migration movements. Whether these experiences were real or imagined, they may have fostered a cultural foundation grounded in self-governance, egalitarianism, and freedom. From this perspective, the settler colonialism structures that took shape during the emerging territorial empires of the Classical and Hellenistic periods, can be seen as extensions of an older cultural ethos. This ethos, centred on freedom and self-rule, may have developed from a foundational colonial narrative that shaped societal identity and values.

In conclusion, drawing from Machiavelli's model, one could argue that mass-migration driven by necessity—settler colonization—whether real or imagined, provides the ideological basis from which the structures of settler colonialism could develop in imperial contexts. In this process, historical experiences and foundational narratives that shape cultural identities played a key role. If this is correct, it raises the question of whether similar dynamics were at play in the early modern period (but see Owen and Hurst 2005 for the risks of using historical analogies in colonial discourses). During this time, the revival of classical culture may have reactivated settler colonial mythologies and ideologies of freedom (Pelgrom and Weststeijn 2020), which helped to foster intellectual and practical frameworks that ultimately fuelled settler colonial ambitions and the eliminatory logics associated with them (E.g.

Lipsius 1598, 1.6). Thus, the key insight from this essayistic attempt to integrate an ancient historical perspective into settler colonial discourse is the need to incorporate (ancient) ideological paradigms and (mytho-)historical frameworks when exploring the underlying dynamics of settler colonial structures (Lupher 2003; Kiernan 2007). The classical texts, alongside the biblical narratives that derived from the same chronological context, serve as foundational origin myths for the Western world, profoundly influencing societal developments and the evolution of settler colonial structures within it.

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Caesar's World Turned Inside Out? Roman Provincial Colonisation and the 'Settler Revolution' of the First Century BCE

Jitse Daniels

This essay was inspired mainly by Lorenzo Veracini's *The world turned inside out*, and an article written by Evan Jewell on colonisation and domestic displacement. Published in 2021, Veracini's study offers an explanation for the emergence of settler colonialism, focusing on metropolitan politics and, specifically, on policies of draining population surpluses. Similarly, Evan Jewell, while not writing within Settler Colonial Studies (SCS) discourse, seeks to explain Roman colonisation in a manner comparable to Veracini's analysis of modern settler colonialism. These works provide a productive foundation for reconsidering key aspects of Roman provincial colonisation, particularly its timing and purpose. The question which motivations lay behind sending out settlers looms large in the background, and it is here that SCS, in particular Veracini's recent work, may prove illuminating. One of the main issues that needs clarification is why there was an explosion of colonial foundations in the Roman provinces under Caesar and Augustus, while Rome had been very reluctant for most of its Republican history to found *coloniae* outside of Italy. Veracini's study can be a helpful starting point here. However, I will first zoom out somewhat to clarify how one could, I believe, apply colonial and settler colonial frameworks to the Roman context and how this may be helpful.

The Roman 'colonial situation' in the East until Caesar

Before addressing the motivations behind the surge in settler colonial foundations, it is important to first outline the context preceding Caesar's colonial program, with a focus on Roman expansion in the East. By the second half of the second century BCE, Greece (Achaea), Macedon, and Asia (western Turkey) had already been incorporated as Roman provinces. Interestingly, the Roman concept of a *provincia* is more akin to what is called an overseas colony in (early) modern contexts, whereas the Roman *colonia*, as I will explain below, signified something very similar to modern settler colonies, albeit small and clearly demarcated ones.

The distinction between a Roman *provincia* and *colonia* has parallels with the one made in SCS discourse between ('exploitative') colonialism and 'settler' colonialism: whereas colonialism aims at subjugating and exploiting the native population for their labour, settler colonists expel or exterminate

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the native population in order to exploit the land themselves (Veracini 2011; Osterhammel 2021). These distinctions have been nuanced and challenged in ongoing discussions in SCS discourse, though, as will be explained, between *provinciae* and *coloniae* the distinctions are arguably much clearer than those made in the debate on colonialism vs. settler colonialism.

Parallels between 'colonies' and 'colonisation' of different eras have been drawn before of course, and not seldom invoke scepticism or confusion. Moses Finley, an influential scholar of ancient history, once attempted to establish a consistent, more specific definition, or typology, of what a colony is (Finley 1976). For him, a colony was first and foremost focused on land and its exploitation, which in the case of a proper colony, by his account, is often done by settlers from the metropolis. As he himself states, British India among many others are ruled out by this definition as colonies, but Roman *coloniae* and the British colonies in America are included. What Finley defined, then, comes very close to what would later be typified as a settler colony, as opposed to colonialism as it developed in British India. Finley too, emphasises the distinction between a *colonia* and a *provincia*, but compares them to what Wales and Ireland were to England rather than what India was for Britain (Finley 1976, 187), which I think is a little off the mark. Finley presents the Roman provinces as thoroughly incorporated into a cohesive empire, but it should be stressed that this reflects the situation only in the later periods of the Roman empire. The provinces were clearly marked as different from the Roman heartland and were exploited mainly to the benefit of the imperial centre.

A Roman *provincia* was basically a region to which a general or governor was sent out and to which his authority was delimited, though, since the institution evolved mainly according to pragmatic and ad hoc needs of Roman policy, there were significant administrative differences between provinces (Alejandro Díaz Fernández 2021) - much like, say, different territories of the British Empire. These regions were put under the sovereignty of a Roman governor, and were in time also structurally exploited not only by means of tax levies – for which local power structures were used as well as Roman contractors – but also by extracting natural resources and setting up (unequal) trade relations. The colonial relation between Rome and her provinces also shows that there was a very clear and lasting conceptual distinction between the homeland, namely Rome and Italy, and all of Rome's provinces. Italy was not subjected to the same exploitative regimes and did not know structural taxation (Bleicken 1974).

In the provinces of Greece (*Achaea*), Macedon and Asia, there were many different groups of Romans already present before any *colonia* was founded. Of course, there were the governor and his staff, along with other officials, and often a garrison of Roman legions, especially in unruly or frontier provinces. Besides these enforcers of empire, there were groups of Romans that can be characterised as the exploiting agents of empire. These groups mainly consisted of the *negotiatores*, the Roman

businessmen and traders of all kinds, and the *publicani*, who were the private contractors that levied taxes in the provinces for the Roman state.

Interesting in this context are recent studies on the role of landownership among these entrepreneurs, which have shown that the possession of land by Roman traders in the Greek world was more prevalent and more important to their business than previously thought. This knowledge has quite some implications for our perception of the role of businessmen in Roman imperialism. These wealthy landowning Romans created large agricultural and industrial estates that aimed at producing high-end products for export, mainly to Italy, such as olive oil, textiles, cattle and marble (Eberle and Le Quéré 2017, 27, 41-42; Zoumbaki 2012, 82-85). This, as two scholars have recently pointed out, is a much more direct exploitation of empire that resembles the situation in early modern colonial empires such as those of Spain, Britain and Holland (Eberle and Le Quéré 2017, 52).

In the present context, the three most important similarities between *provinciae* and modern overseas colonies are the following:

1. Both *provinciae* and modern overseas colonies came to be governed by metropolitan agents overseeing an indigenous population
2. In both cases there was a clear and perpetuated conceptual and legal distinction between metropolis and colony/*provincia*
3. Both saw a class of private traders and contractors that were indispensable for the exploitation of the *provincia*/colony

On account of these similarities, the comparison between *provinciae* and modern overseas colonies is a useful one, as it clarifies what provinces were in relation to actual Roman *coloniae*. In a way, these *coloniae* were pockets of settler colonies inserted into this larger colonial structure, which was, in must be stressed, already firmly anchored.

Pre-colonial Roman foundations in the east

This brings me to another aspect of the pre-Caesarean situation in the Greek provinces which I want to address, namely the urban centres founded by Pompey that came to function as administrative centres for Roman governors. They are relevant here because they form an alternative to Roman colonisation in that they fulfil some of the same functions as urban centres that *coloniae* could fulfil. This is often neglected when historians discuss the role of Roman colonies in the eastern provinces.

When Pompey had subjugated Anatolia in the mid-1st century BCE, he moved about pacifying and reorganising the region, creating several new provinces (Eilers 2005, 90-91). Between 88 and 63 BCE, wars were fought against Mithridates, the king of Pontus (i.e. northern Anatolia), who had incited

rebellions throughout Rome's eastern provinces. This had greatly shaken Rome's hold on the region and had led to great massacres of the Romans living among the native population. Rome had cracked down hard on those who had joined Mithridates' side, and Romans supporting the imperial apparatus had flowed back in as soon as Rome regained control of Asia and many newly acquired territories (Santangelo 2007, 50-67, 107-134). Like in Asia, for convenient administration the provinces were divided up into administrative units which needed urban centres. Especially in Pontus, where no urban administrative centres had formed, Pompey found that such urban centres needed to be created (Sherwin-White 1984, 229-230). For this, he resorted to the Greek practice of synoecism, creating new civic units with an urban nucleus by moving and combining the surrounding population into that new unit (Jones 1987, 104-105). That Pompey opted for this Greek urban model is very understandable in this context: given the mainly Greek culture of the region it would have been much easier to anchor Greek-style urban centres which were more familiar to local elites – cooperation with the local elites while subjugating such a gigantic region was key (Sherwin-White 1984, 226-229; Gelzer 1949, 105-107).

The interesting point is that these cities functioned well as administrative centres and could be anchored easily in the Greek urban and political system. In this way, they are arguably much more desirable than *coloniae* for anchoring Roman rule without disrupting the social and political hierarchy as much. The fact that Pompey chose this path even in a time and place where military control seemed highly desirable, makes one doubt that Roman colonies were mainly means of military control or urbanisation during this period. In fact, Augustus too would not seldom opt for this type of city-founding. In Epirus and Egypt Augustus founded new Greek port cities, and in Anatolia, Augustus used the same process of synoecism to found the cities of Pessinus, Tavium and Ancyra (modern-day Ankara), in order to urbanise regions that knew no urban centres (Mitchell 1993, 80-81). Thus, this excursus shows that the Romans had other effective methods for urbanising and controlling regions that were less disruptive to elite exploitation structures than founding large settler colonies.

To summarise, there was already a significant Roman presence in the provinces, with businessmen, traders, and governors active in the region. Roman military leaders and imperial administrators had already experimented with methods for creating new urban centers without founding colonies. It was within this complex context that the *coloniae* of Caesar and Augustus were established—not on terra nullius or in hostile, barbarian lands, but in highly urbanised regions with established civic cultures, where Romans had already set up an imperial colonial structure. This leads to the question: what role did the *colonia* serve in Roman imperialism?

Roman coloniae: Modern research

Studies on Roman *coloniae* in the Greek east have traditionally focused on their foundation, their distribution, their military or economic role, and the provenance of the colonists (Vittinghoff 1952; Salmon 1969; Bowersock 1981). Historians have often explained colonies in military-strategic or sometimes in economic terms. Scholars have long known settling demographic surpluses to have been an important function of *coloniae*, but the implications of this should be pursued further. While there have recently been many studies on individual *coloniae* and their development over time, there is now more need for re-evaluation of the imperial political aspect of colonisation. There is no satisfactory explanation why so many *coloniae*, which were populated for a large part by the urban plebs of Rome, were founded in the provinces roughly at the same time.

It is here that a deeper focus on the sociopolitical motivations of Roman colonisation is necessary, for which SCS may prove very helpful. Veracini's *The world inside out* may be used to provide a useful framework from which to depart. In that work, Veracini addresses the question of how and why so many settlers got where they are today, leaving their metropoles behind and building communities elsewhere (Veracini 2021). He argues that settler colonialism, climaxing in a true settler revolution in the nineteenth century, constitutes a transnational political logic that, in order to prevent revolution, aims at voluntary displacement of impoverished population surpluses from the metropole. Such a political tradition seems clearly visible in the Roman context as well. And viewed within this context, we might identify something resembling a 'settler revolution' in the first century BCE under Caesar. Two important points follow from this comparison that can bring us closer to understanding the sudden colonisation of Rome's provinces in the first century BCE. Firstly, a political logic similar to that which Veracini has identified, i.e. stimulating 'colonial' migration in order to prevent revolution in the metropole, was present in Rome (as substantiated by Evan Jewell 2019). Secondly, something crucial had changed during Caesar's reign that explains this sudden Roman settler revolution, which moved Caesar to successfully plant settler colonies into Rome's provincial territories. The reason for this, I think, lies in internal Roman social and political processes, rather than in the provinces themselves. After all, we know that Caesar and Augustus stood at the beginning and the end of a fundamental regime change in the Roman empire. The foundation of Roman *coloniae* at this time in the east, I argue below, can be understood through their role in facilitating and stabilizing a regime change at the core of the empire.

Roman coloniae as a means of anchoring a regime change?

Recent studies on the previously mentioned Roman businessmen exploiting the provinces support the view that these *coloniae* were inserted into, and even disrupted an existing colonial structure. Particularly relevant is the observation that not only the indigenous population, but the Romans already living in Greece too, experienced disruption due to the influx of settlers. One study has shown that the Roman elite owned land in many parts of Greece, also where *coloniae* were founded, such as Butrint in Epirus. There is a case known concerning Titus Pomponius Atticus' estates near Butrint which were threatened to be incorporated in the Caesarean *colonia* that was planned there (Cic. *Att.* 16.16B.3-4). Atticus (a well-known and very wealthy member of the Roman elite) lobbied hard to save his estates, but due to the chaos after Caesar's assassination his efforts were in the end fruitless (Eberle, and Le Quéré 2017, 37; Deniaux 1987, 250-253). This is a clear example of how the wave of settler colonial foundations in the east could come into conflict with the Romans that were already running businesses in the provinces. The crucial point here is that *coloniae* could very well disrupt the provincial (that is, colonial?) system of exploitation that was already in place - they did not simply support or reinforce that system.

On the other hand, the foundation of Roman *coloniae* naturally entailed the creation of many more Italian landowners in Greece. The interesting difference between the two groups is that these colonists were far greater in number and were mainly simple, lower class Romans - not commercial big shots from the upper classes of Rome. In Italy the tensions between elite property and proletarian poverty had been a recurring issue, and now Caesar brought this class struggle to the provinces, in a way, by settling proletarians there in great numbers. Here, then, we observe something corresponding to a settler colonial logic as Veracini explained it, in that Caesar exported an internal class struggle. According to Veracini's logic, this exportation was to prevent a regime change, and, according to Evan Jewell, this colonisation programme was the result of an elite solidarity based on a fear of proletarian insurrection. However, there is a problem that complicates Jewell's argument.

Put briefly, elite solidarity in the late Republic is an illusion. In fact, the voices that had often propagated settler colonial policies in Rome did not belong to a monolithic elite, but rather belonged to a succession of dissident groups who can be described as populists, starting with the Gracchi (two politicians from the 2nd century BCE who turned against the Senatorial majority and who mainly pursued land distributions and colonisation). Caesar's colonial politics has often been described as being firmly grounded in the Gracchan tradition, aiming at the provision of land for the landless poor to settle (Brunt 1971, 256). There was therefore no elite consensus on how to 'drain the masses', i.e. on settler colonial policies, to prevent a revolution. Settler colonial policies were a deeply divisive issue and were mainly used by the Gracchan 'populists' to further their political agenda. Caesar, put simply, was the first one

who succeeded in pushing through such an agenda. Thus it rather seems that Caesar initiated a 'settler revolution' not to prevent a revolution at home, but to anchor his own.

The fact that a few decades earlier Sulla, an oligarch at the head of his own conservative, elitist faction, had exactly the opposite policies in mind for the Roman provinces, makes this point all the more interesting. Sulla conspicuously did not found any *coloniae* in the provinces, while as a dictator he was in the perfect position to do so. At the same time the data collected by recent studies shows that private Roman landownership in the provinces grew spectacularly after Sulla had subdued the eastern provinces that had rebelled against Rome (Eberle and Le Quéré 2017, 30-32). Sulla thus practically reserved the provinces for the elite to exploit.

In this context, could it be justified to see the Caesarean colonisation programme as a means of opening up the provinces to the proletariat while curbing the (economic) privileges and influence that the senatorial elite had enjoyed in the provinces? The internal Roman class struggle, which, simply put, boils down to a struggle over how the spoils of Empire were to be divided, is with the Caesarean colonisation programme settled more in favour of the lower classes. Of course, Caesar expected political endorsement in return, and could have relied on political support from his *coloniae*. It seems, then, that Caesar's settler colonies were meant to help control the provincial imperial structure on his behalf. This structure, after all, was set up by the system preceding Caesar's coup, and might have had different political and economic priorities. The colonies might in this way have supported Caesar's regime change. In any case, Caesar clearly deemed the foundation of dozens of colonies throughout the provinces a desirable way to bring change to the previous system - for change the colonies brought. That Caesar, a political dissident standing in the Gracchan tradition, now had absolute political control might then provide the best explanation for why it was at this time that Rome suddenly and vigorously planted dozens of settler colonies throughout its overseas empire. The question why this particular mode of domination was deemed most suitable by this 'Gracchan faction' and by Augustus is the larger issue needing explanation – one that most definitely needs more attention than is available in the span of this essay.

This brief study indicates that internal political and ideological principles had a strong influence on the timing and nature of the colonisation process of the first century BCE. Recent studies on Roman *coloniae* in the east do not often consider the influence of such political ideas on Roman colonisation. As I have tried to substantiate, the settler colonial logic identified by Veracini provides a good framework with which to rectify this, although I have also argued that the internal politics of Rome do not reflect a straightforward elite logic of displacing the proletariat; this issue was embedded in more complicated political and ideological struggles that, when researched more thoroughly, may explain

better why Rome knew such a sudden settler revolution under Caesar, when he decided to insert dozens of miniature settler colonies in the Roman empire overseas.

Reflecting on Settler Colonial Studies, and in particular on the internal dynamics of the metropole and its role in initiating settler colonialism, this essay suggests seeing the metropole as a multi-layered phenomenon. Of course, Settler Colonialism's strength as a concept lies in its capacity to examine overarching socioeconomic and -political structures, necessitating a high degree of abstraction. However, it might be fruitful to dissect the metropole to enable inquiring – within the Settler Colonial structure – how different parties or factions within the metropole competed with each other behind the scenes to push through their own desired mode of colonisation and domination. After all, recent research has identified numerous such different modes of colonialism (for an overview see Veracini 2023, 1-3). These inquiries can, in turn, illuminate how specific modes of domination benefited particular political, social, or economic classes and the mechanisms through which these benefits were realised.

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Settler Colonialism as a Structure?

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Reason of State Literature in Dutch Colonial Practice: Pieter van Hoorn in Batavia

Dinah Wouters

What role do intellectual arguments in favour of settler colonialism play in the practice of colonial administrators? During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europeans not only founded settler colonies, they also wrote theories about the benefits that this specific form of colonialism could bring to a state. I will discuss the example of a colonial administrator whose correspondence shows that he had read this kind of political philosophy extensively and who based practical decisions on this knowledge. The name of this administrator is Pieter van Hoorn, who was a member of the Council of the Indies from 1663 to 1677. The Council of the Indies was an administrative body located in Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies, whose task it was to advise the governor-general.

The Dutch context makes the case more special, because the Dutch Republic did not have large settler communities and was hesitant about promoting them because that would potentially endanger the trade monopoly by the Dutch East India Company. Van Hoorn's voice testifies to a pro-settler discourse that is not often remembered in scholarship. In a letter to the Directors of the East India Company in 1675, he argued for the relative independence of the colony of Batavia, and he did so on the basis of theoretical literature on Roman colonialism and the lessons that modern states should learn from it. The combination of the two gives an insight into the role of reason of state literature in interpreting practical circumstances.

In Settler Colonial Studies (SCS), the primary focus has traditionally been on material factors, such as socio-economic and demographic dynamics, that shape settler colonial structures. This contribution, however, highlights the crucial role of intellectual discourses in the development of settler colonial politics. By examining the influence of ideas, narratives, and ideologies, it reveals how these discourses not only reflected but had the potential to actively drive the establishment and maintenance of settler colonial systems, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their formation and endurance.

The Dutch debate over settler colonialism

Initially, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) had no intention of establishing settler colonies. Throughout the seventeenth century, there were occasional arguments—both from within and outside

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the VOC—that it might be advantageous to create settler communities in the East Indies, modelled after Spanish or Portuguese colonies. Looking at the contemporary Spanish and Portuguese Empires, and frequently also at the Roman Empire, these people argued that Dutch power overseas could not in the long term be maintained only by means of soldiers, a handful of traders and administrators, Chinese middlemen and local people, as the latter two groups could not be trusted and the former were too few. However, such proposals were fundamentally incompatible with the VOC's functioning as a trading company. Holding an exclusive monopoly on trade east of the Cape, the VOC effectively prohibited private initiatives by Dutch citizens, cutting off potential settlers from their most likely source of income. For settler communities to thrive overseas, the trade monopoly would have needed to be relaxed. As a result, arguments in favour of settler colonialism repeatedly clashed with the economic priorities of the VOC and its highly profitable monopoly.

In the first decades of the seventeenth century, some governors-general, such as Jan Pietersz Coen, wrote to Amsterdam asking for colonists, especially women, so that they would be able to maintain a viable Dutch society overseas. Others, such as Hendrik Brouwer, were completely against the idea and thought that soldiers would be better off marrying local women. In general, Dutch women who came to the colony seem to have had no desire to stay for longer than needed to make some money; people like Brouwer had a low opinion of these women and thought that local women would provide a more stable home and healthier children (Taylor 2004, 14).

In the 1640s, the discussion was taken up again by the Board of Directors (Heren XVII). The Directors in Amsterdam then asked the Council of the Indies, the advisory body to the Governor-General in Batavia, for advice on the question of opening up the Company's monopoly on trade: should Dutch citizens in the colonies be allowed to participate in trade, or should this remain the prerogative of the Company? Most members of the Council declared themselves not in favour of this. Some of them would have liked more permanent Dutch settlers, in principle, but they were convinced that this was not feasible in practice, even if the trading monopoly was not continued. This mostly had to do with the kind of Dutch people who were willing to go to the colonies: these poor and uneducated people were not seen as trustworthy settlers.

Only one member of the council, Johan Maetsuycker, advised in favour of settlers. In his lengthy advice, he first summarised all the arguments of the opponents: that settlers would be made up of the worst elements in society, that they would not be loyal, that they would not be able to make a living, and that they would return home as soon as they had made some money. Although Maetsuycker agreed with these arguments to a certain extent, he did think it possible to create a thriving settler colony under the right conditions. If the colony has a good government and upright laws, immoral people can be turned into good citizens. In order to make loyal citizens out of these poor migrants, however, you

have to make some concessions and trust them with a part of the trade that is now monopolised by the Company.

The directors in Amsterdam did not follow Maetsuycker's advice, but the advice of the majority to keep the trade monopoly and not to allow settler colonialism. They took the definite decision in 1652 and after that, the discussion seems to have died down until the 1660s. In the meantime, Johan Maetsuyker became governor-general, a position he held for 25 years until his death in 1678. During the 1660s, tentative steps were taken to create a positive climate for Dutch settlers: the foundation of a Latin school, the partial opening up of the trade monopoly, and the allowance for more migrants from the Republic to travel to the colony. However, after the disastrous year of 1672, when the Republic was attacked by almost all its neighbours, the whole situation changed. The Republic was at war and struggling, could not import as much and pay as much, and the Company was no longer making a profit. They blamed this on the opening up of trade and imposed a very strict trade monopoly again.

Johan Maetsuyker and the other members of the Council of the Indies did not agree, and Pieter van Hoorn, one of the members of the Council, wrote a letter to Amsterdam in which he took the pro-settler stance much further than Maetsuyker had done 25 years earlier. He argued that a colony could only flourish if it was largely independent of the metropole. Especially in the crucial early stages, it should not be burdened by taxes or trade restrictions, and it should not be guided by the self-centred, profit-driven considerations of others, but led by a local council that has the colony's own best interests at heart. The Company consistently acted against the interests of Batavia, not only by enforcing the trade monopoly, but also by prioritising new conquests and involvement in local military conflicts over the sustainable expansion of agriculture around Batavia.

Not unexpectedly, this letter was not well received in Amsterdam. Instead of listening to Maetsuyker and Van Hoorn, the board of directors listened to the advice of Rijcklof van Goens, another member of the Council of the Indies who was to succeed Maetsuyker as governor-general. Van Goens had a completely different view of Batavia, and was very much in favour of enforcing the trade monopoly coupled with military expansion. In 1677, five older members of the Council of the Indies, including Pieter van Hoorn, were dismissed. These were probably the ones in favour of more independence for the local community. Despite these setbacks, in 1678 the son of van Hoorn, Johan van Hoorn, as the new governor-general, began to colonise the area around Batavia, bringing in surveyors to draw up maps of ownership.

Settler colonialism as a secret to success

Although his proposal was not accepted, a closer look at the arguments presented in Van Hoorn's letter is interesting because it makes extensive use of what is known as reason of state literature. This genre was developed from the end of the sixteenth century by authors such as Nicolo Machiavelli, Giovanni Botero, Jean Bodin, Justus Lipsius and Arnold Clapmar. Their idea was that the survival and the success of states must be underpinned by empirically proven principles. So these authors delved into history in search of the secrets of the rise and fall of states and empires, the so-called *arcana imperii*. One of these secrets was settler colonialism. Van Hoorn's advice refers to all the major discussions of colonisation as a secret of empire that were available at the time.

First, it draws on the work of Carlo Sigonio. This sixteenth-century Italian humanist had analysed the socio-political history of the Roman Republic and its spread in Italy in his *works De antiquo iure civium Romanorum* (1560) and *De antiquo iure Italiae* (1560) (McCuaig 1989). He was the first to stress that the Roman colonies had advantages other than military ones, stating that the establishment of colonies and the distribution of land served as a remedy for overpopulation and social conflict in Rome (Pelgrom and Weststeijn 2020). Van Hoorn mentions both types of benefits.

Second, to the classical distinction between colonies founded by a free group of refugees and colonies founded by people sent out by a state (as it is found for instance in the commentary of Servius on Vergil's *Aeneid* 1.12), van Hoorn adds a further distinction within the second type of colony, namely between colonies founded in the country itself by people born there, or by foreigners in distant countries. The first category seems to refer to the colonisation of either wastelands or neighbouring territories. Van Hoorn has an interesting way of expressing this distinction. He says that "a colony under another's rule is founded and extended in the same country and under the same jurisdiction and rule where the mother of the colony resides and rules; or a colony is founded and extended outside a country, jurisdiction and rule of the mother of the colony and where the mother does not reside" (de Jonge 1872, 131). This seems to imply that overseas colonies are not under the jurisdiction and government of the metropole. Read in the context of Dutch colonisation, this makes sense, because the East India Company was essentially a commercial enterprise, albeit one that could exercise state power in some respects, such as waging war and negotiating treaties. The Dutch Empire saw itself as a maritime empire, and as Hugo Grotius had said, no one can claim dominium or imperium over the seas. As a general statement about overseas colonies, however, it sounds strange to say that a colony overseas falls outside the jurisdiction and rule of the metropole.

Van Hoorn continues by saying that a colony that is not free, because it is founded on the orders of a republic or monarchy, will never flourish as long as it is expected to serve the interests of the metropole and not its own. This can be read in the context of the next few paragraphs of the letter, where

van Hoorn gives a list of twenty characteristics of successful colonies. This list is almost entirely taken from Francis Bacon's essay *Of Plantations*, although van Hoorn does not make the attribution explicit. The Latin translation of Bacon's collection of essays, *Sermones Fideles Sive Interiora Rerum* had been printed in 1638 and again in 1641 in Leiden. With Bacon, van Hoorn argues that a colony is like a tree: when you plant it, you should give it time to grow and not expect to reap the fruits of your labour for at least twenty years. Therefore, it is absolutely detrimental to leave the care of a colony in the hands of merchants who think only of short-term profits. In the early years of a colony, it should not be expected to pay taxes and should be allowed to establish itself through free trade. It should not get involved in local conflicts and conquests, but should concentrate on itself first. Also, the colony should not depend on too large a council in the metropole, but on a small number of people, as this makes its government more effective.

All of these points, first made by Francis Bacon, are very fitting to the case van Hoorn wishes to make. He analyses the stunted growth of Batavia as the result of mismanagement by a commercial enterprise that thinks only in terms of profit. It attracts idlers and adventurers, and whenever it has built up a semblance of a stable population, people are sent elsewhere to new colonies. It does not develop outside the city walls, where the farmland is a constant target for raiders. And worst of all, it is burdened with military expeditions and new conquests that it cannot possibly sustain, so its very existence is constantly threatened. His advice was specifically directed against the plans of another member of the Council of the Indies, Rijckloff van Goens, who had recently conquered Ceylon and proposed to make it the capital of the Dutch East Indies instead of Batavia. Van Hoorn protested against this new conquest and warned of imperial overstretch, as the funds that would be used to defend the new conquests would not be used to expand the existing settler colony. He strongly protested against the idea that a settler colony could simply be abandoned and rebuilt elsewhere. With Bacon, he says that a settler colony should never be uprooted and abandoned.

Subsequently, van Hoorn also refers to Machiavelli by saying that a republic should periodically purify itself by returning to its first principles (de Jonge 1872, 141; Weststeijn 2014, 26). In the case of Batavia, this would mean returning it to the condition of a military bulwark and trading post. Van Hoorn would see this as relief from the heavy responsibilities over conquered territories that Batavia now bears. However, he also says that the colony has now progressed too far. Batavia has long since become a colony, and the difference between a conquest and a colony is that you can abandon the former, but not the latter. So the Company now has a responsibility to let Batavia develop itself into a thriving colony, which means that its citizens must be able to participate in trade and manage their own affairs, with an eye to the long-term welfare of the community.

Finally, van Hoorn refers to a statement by Velleius Paterculus, a Roman historian from the first century AD. Van Hoorn calls him 'Paberculus', suggesting that he was not familiar with the full text but may have read about it in a discussion on Roman colonialism. Paterculus claimed that the Romans made a mistake when they first established colonies outside of Italy. He said that they had always avoided doing so before, because they had seen how Greek and Phoenician colonies could become more powerful than their founding city. Van Hoorn quotes this but notes that it is probably too late for this particular secret of empire. Basing himself on reason of state literature, he is convinced that an empire needs to work on coherence before it can expand further. In this way, he can argue that Batavia must first be consolidated as the capital colony of Dutch trade in the East Indies, before the capital is moved to new locations or new colonies are founded.

Insights in settler colonialism

The central argument of settler colonial studies is that settler colonialism has its own dynamic, different from colonialism without large settler communities. Van Hoorn's letter to the Directors of the East India Company in Amsterdam shows not only that he derives this same insight from his reading of reason of state literature, but that it is an insight that shapes his understanding of the Dutch colonies and the course that the Company should take.

Van Hoorn does not say that settler colonisation is a superior way of building an empire. He admits that the Dutch Republic could have chosen to build their colonial empire solely on trading posts and conquests - although this might be a rhetorical strategy. However, a settler colony is different from a trading post or fortress. It is a community that must be able to develop itself. Once you have established a settler colony, you need a different colonial strategy, which includes not only commercial and military interests, but also a plan for the population of the colony. This introduces a completely new perspective into the Dutch debate on the advantages of settler colonialism. All other proponents of settler colonialism envision that settlers will best serve the commercial or political interests of the metropolis. This might also be van Hoorn's final aim, but he also strongly advocates for the relative political autonomy and self-determination of the colony. Copying Francis Bacon, van Hoorn states that it is a moral duty never to abandon a settler colony, even if it should never have been started in the first place! This seems significant in the light of settler colonial studies because it creates a teleology for the colony that is separate from the interests of the metropolis. The founding of a colony then sets in motion a process of land division and expansion that should not be halted or impeded.

In the context of Batavia, however, this theory clashed not only with the commercial interests of the East India Company, but also with practical limitations. Although van Hoorn emphasised

agriculture and expansion around the colony of Batavia, he knew that such large-scale migration was highly unlikely. It was difficult to even find people in the homeland who were willing to migrate (Klooster 2016, 189–98), and when van Hoorn's son eventually began to cultivate the surrounding lands, he worked mostly with the existing Chinese middle class, not with Dutch settlers (Blussé, 2023).

Nevertheless, I find it significant that we encounter this kind of ideological argument, rooted in political philosophy and classical knowledge, in a letter written by a Dutch colonial administrator to the VOC. First, even in the seventeenth century, the Dutch preferred to speak about their colonial project in commercial and practical terms; overtly ideological and political discourses are more rare (Raben 2013). We see this in the debate about settler colonialism: the debate revolves less about the reasons why one would or should send settlers overseas than about how these settlers can make a living without commercially competing with the VOC. Second, although the Dutch had a few minor settler colonies, they did not practice settler colonialism on a large scale during this time. Even so, we find a colonial administrator in Batavia who not only defended his colony as an autonomous political unity with its own teleology, but who was willing to call upon all the reason of state literature that was available to make his case. This demonstrates both how quickly settler communities began to agitate against the idea of servility to the metropole, but also how fundamental the role of ideology and classical knowledge could be.

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When Does a Settler Become an Ancient Settler?

Mark L. Thompson

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the historical category of settler in relation to the field of settler colonial studies (SCS). Such reflection also requires considering the category of native as its counterpart and nominal antagonist, of course. As the Ugandan scholar of colonialism Mahmood Mamdani writes, "Settlers and natives belong together. You cannot have one without the other, for it is the relationship between them that makes one a settler and the other a native." Within the broader field of colonial studies, including SCS, these binary categories of settler and native are often applied to historical (and contemporary) populations in a matter-of-fact way. Yet as Mamdani and his later interlocutors have pointed out, making such distinctions can be far from straightforward in practice (Mamdani 1998, Mamdani 2020).

Indeed, as Yuval Evri and Hagar Kotef argue in a recent essay responding to Mamdani, such complications of the settler-native binary raise difficult questions about concepts and claims that are central to SCS. If the key distinction between settler and native isn't "strictly racial," but rather "a geographical binary, between those who were in the land and those who came to it from outside (invaded)," how does one make sense of the various histories and genealogies of being in the land (and being invaded) alongside the historical mutability of the statuses of insider and outsider? What does it mean if "a group of people can hold, at different historical moments (and sometimes simultaneously), the positions of both settler and native"? (Evri and Kotef, 2022).

Here I would like to consider the example of a category of settlers in British America who came to be known variously as "ancient settlers," "ancient planters," and "old settlers." These overlapping sets of terms all referred to a class of settlers who had some claim to precedence within a particular colony or settlement because they (or their direct ancestors) belonged to the first, original, and/or founding population of settlers in that place. "Ancient" in this respect might be read to mean merely "(very) old," but it could also suggest a kind of originary and special status that derived from its "antique" character, so to speak. In a sense, these settlers were akin to being "native" colonizers, and their descendants, natives of and to the colony, often inherited or claimed this status, as well. The modifier ancient also points to the significance time and memory had in colonizing populations' conceptions of themselves. Patrick Wolfe may have been right that settler colonialism is "a structure[,] not an event," but these actors understood colonization as a persistent historical "structure" operating through time as well as the product of a specific originary "event" situated in the time of the past (Wolfe 2006, 388). Even so, the explicit link to the (distant) past also suggested a sense of archaism. To be

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"ancient" implied that these first settlers had been succeeded not only by their own native-born descendants but also by latecomers who were somehow distinct from them. There was a suggestion that these later arrivals, whatever their origins, ought to show some deference if not gratitude to this cohort of hardy pioneers who established the foundation for the more stable and successful settlement that followed.

This distinction between generations of settlers is something that often seems to be missing in my (admittedly selective) readings in SCS. There, as in much other theorization about colonies, settler colonies are often presumed to originate at a single moment from a single transplanted national group and develop in a linear, organic fashion from that point. In Wolfe's formulation of SCS, the particular conditions at the founding "event" of a colony are explicitly considered to be less significant than the systematic processes of elimination and replacement that form the general "structure" of settler colonialism thereafter. Establishing the basic oppositional categories of settler and native appears to be more fundamental to understanding the colonial process than is specifying who those settlers and natives actually were or how they came to acquire those statuses in the first place.

By contrast, the mainstream historiography of colonial North America typically places great emphasis on the importance of founding eras and populations and on the subsequent development of distinctive creole colonial cultures and settler societies over time. In particular, one of the key concepts for characterizing colonial cultural formation is that of the "charter group" (or, relatedly, "charter generation"), which refers to the first group of migrants to a new colony and their ability to determine the norms and institutions to which later groups must adapt themselves (Porter 1965; Higham 1968; Breen 1985; Berlin 1996). This is a useful concept in certain respects, but (like SCS) it tends to assume a linear and singular process of cultural transfer and development beginning with an influential original group of settlers who were sharply distinguished from native populations as well as from later "immigrants." Yet, empirically speaking (and imperially speaking), many colonial societies had complex, plural origins in which categorizations of settler and native were not always so simple or so straightforward.

Consider, for example, the descendants of the Finns and Swedes who addressed Pennsylvania's provincial assembly in 1709. In their petition they complained about the way the leading proprietary official in the colony, James Logan, had "fraudulently" taken away their patents and forced them to pay higher quitrents. They identified themselves as "we the Sweeds, antient Setlers (sic?) and first inhabitants of this Province," emphasizing the fact that their settlement of the Delaware Valley preceded the founding of Pennsylvania itself (1681). The petitioners traced their ancestry back over half a century to the colony of New Sweden (1638-1655), which had been established before William Penn was born. Their presence along the river also antedated the previous English colonial regime that had governed

the European settlers along the river (New York: 1664-1673; 1674-1681) and was contemporaneous to the rival Dutch colonial regime based at Manhattan that eventually conquered them in 1655 (New Netherland: ca. 1624-1654; 1655-1664; 1673-74). By contrast, the mostly British-descended members of the Pennsylvania Assembly who considered their petition were either relative or actual newcomers to the region, even if they may have belonged to that initial privileged group of settler-investors in Pennsylvania known as the "First Adventurers" (Thompson 2013; Thompson 2022).

To be an "ancient settler" in this case was to belong to a class of settlers who possessed land titles that predated those that had been issued and authorized by the current colonial regime. A related term, "ancient planter," was much more common during the seventeenth century. (Indeed, in Anglophone writing the term planter would remain far more popular than settler during the eighteenth century. The term settler in the sense of "colonist" was used either rarely or not at all until the 1680s, and through the end of the eighteenth century usually referred to people who were in the act of settling "new" lands.) In Virginia, for example, the aggrieved first generation of settlers were already calling themselves "ancient planters" by the mid-1620s, less than twenty years after the colony's founding (Briefe Declaration 1624). Meanwhile, in 1684, a group of "ancient Swedes" in Pennsylvania prepared an affidavit on William Penn's behalf to counter Lord Baltimore's claims along the west side of the Delaware River. There they referred to themselves as the "ancient Planters … of the Swedish Nation." Testifying in defense of Penn's claims as proprietor of Pennsylvania, they asserted that they "did anciently purchase of the Natives the Lands" along the western shore that Lord Baltimore was claiming under his charter for Maryland (Dunlap and Weslager 1967). Indeed, it was their status as "first purchasers" of (ancient) native lands that cemented their status as ancient settlers on this land. Among the later signers of the 1709 petition were these men's children, who also claimed this status for themselves.

Later, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term "ancient settler" would also be used in the United States to refer to already established settler populations who had held property within "foreign" (colonial) territories that were later incorporated into the USA (such as Louisiana, Illinois, and California). British Canadians also referred to French inhabitants within Canada as "ancient settlers" well into the nineteenth century. In each case, a long-established population possessed some local influence and recognition but did not necessarily (or usually) possess much power. In fact, the claim to "ancient settler" status often seemed to be conditioned by a general state of weakness. These settlers were articulating a rhetorical claim to be a privileged charter group exactly because they had lost the actual capacity to assert that claim against another, more powerful chartered group.

But to claim "ancient settler" status was also to assert that one was not native (and not a Native). These "old settlers" did not want to be overwhelmed by the new settler regime; indeed, they wanted to

be recognized as its original founders even if they had lost whatever claims they may have had to have been its rulers. In order to gain this recognition, they often made exaggerated claims about dominating the people they sometimes called the "ancient inhabitants" of the region, namely the Indians. For example, at the very start of the Finns' and Swedes' petition in 1709, they wrote that they had originally settled the province "with great difficulty hazard and loss of severall of our lives" and only later "obtained peace and quietnes with the Indians." Since then, they had lived under "divers sorts of governments … peaceably and quietly unmolested, enjoying our lands and estates, which we first settled under our own government." In similar appeals before and after, "the Swedes" would emphasize not only that they had first settled the region but that they had also first pacified the Indians, too. They made such claims despite the fact—or because of the fact—that after a half century of relations with the Lenape of the Delaware River, they were seen as "half Indians, when the English arrived in the year 1682," as Finnish-Swedish naturalist Pehr Kalm wrote in the mid-1700s (Kalm 1770-1771). (The claim may not have been merely rhetorical—historian Jean Soderlund has speculated that there may have been undocumented intermarriage between Finnish and Swedish men and Lenape women dating back to the seventeenth century (Soderlund 2015, 68).) Moreover, as the affidavit from 1683 made clear, these settlers and their descendants often traced their land titles to purchases they had made directly from the "original owners," the Lenapes. For generations afterwards, they would claim special "Indian rights" to lands across the region that they traced back to these "ancient" purchases (Thompson 2022).

These colonists made a claim to being the ancient settlers but not the ancient inhabitants of the province. But they also set themselves apart from the British Quakers and other European settlers who were already in the process of overwhelming, assimilating, and (culturally) eliminating them. After initially assisting Penn's officers in the early years of the new colony, many embittered "ancient Swedes" also turned against the proprietary government that they blamed for their troubles. In order to resist and survive—the key tools of the native in the binary native-settler structure—they had to open up and claim a special space for themselves within the settler category in order to make clear which side of the line they fell.

Here it may be useful to return to Mamdani, who argues in his book Neither Settler nor Native (2020), that in both the United States and South Africa, settlers were not defined by "the color of their skin" or "by language, culture, religion, gender, or socioeconomic status . . . nor by the length of residency, immigration status, or even citizenship status." Rather, what "defined the settler was the law to which she was subject"—the "civil law" of settlers versus the "customary law" of natives (Mamdani 2020, 145-46). The claim to be an "ancient settler" could mean many things, but in practice it was a dual claim to law and land. In an Anglo-American legal system based on precedence as well as precedents, to be recognized as the first rightful possessors of (native) land under Mamdani's so-called

"civil law" was an important status to have. They may have lacked the power to assert their claims, but they could claim the authority to have the state recognize those claims and to treat them with the respect—and give them the justice—that they were due under the law. To the extent that they were successful it was because, of course, that the law and and the state that they were appealing to also depended on those originary acts of dispossession in order to justify themselves. "Native" claimants, by contrast, often had to depend on treaty negotiations, not the courts—international law instead of civil law—and frequently found themselves (and still find themselves) systematically dispossessed as a result.

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KNIR DIALOGUES ONLINE 1 (2025)
Settler Colonialism as a Structure?

Plantations in the Peatlands? Domestic Colonization and Settlement in the Nineteenth-Century Dutch North

Maarten Zwiers

A series of settlements in the Northeast of the Netherlands carry the epithet "colonial," for example the colonies founded by the Society of Benevolence in the provinces of Drenthe and Overijssel and the Peat Colonies (Veenkoloniën) along the provincial border between Drenthe and Groningen. To what extent can we identify (settler) colonial frames in the formation of these communities? Some settler colonial aspects appear to be present in the sense that *terra nullius* or "empty" land (in this case swampland) was occupied and cleared for cultivation. Patrick Wolfe's claim that "the colonizer came to stay—invasion is a structure not an event" (Wolfe 2006, 388) is less clearly visible in the Colonies of Benevolence, however. The underlying idea of Society colonies like Veenhuizen was the education and eventual reintegration of colonists back into society as virtuous citizens. The Peat Colonies served as a Dutch Frontier of sorts – newspapers from the 1850s described Drenthe as "Nederlandsch Californië" – where adventurous individuals and cash-rich corporations could make a quick buck. Large-scale agriculture and persistent poverty nowadays characterize society in the Peat Colonies (Meij, Haartsen, and Meijering 2020, 227). Combined, the Colonies of Benevolence (in particular Veenhuizen) and the Peat Colonies seemingly followed the extractive logic of the plantation with regard to labor, land, and natural resources. Did connections exist between these specific forms of settlement in the North of the Netherlands and plantation templates in other parts of the world, for instance Asia and the Americas? Besides investigating such interrelations, this essay also suggests a more global perspective to study the history of settlement and extraction in the Dutch North.

As a (settler) colonial institution and outpost, the Plantation stood in direct opposition to the Swamp. While plantations represented cultivation (both in an agricultural and a social sense, with the planter elite embodying aristocratic elan), orderliness, and productivity, swamps constituted wastelands that needed to be brought under human control to make them useful. Geographer Morgan Vickers designates the framing of marshy areas as abject spaces "swampification," which signifies the "process whereby governments, corporations, and the press socially (re)invented swamplands as uninhabitable spaces of death and disease to justify their destruction" (Vickers 2023, 1675). When Europeans began colonization efforts in Asia and the Americas, the plantation became an important settlement format to occupy new territories. After the North American colonies won independence from England, the frontier experience soon manifested itself as a principal state formation instrument and eventually a

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founding narrative for the United States. As historian Frederick Jackson Turner argued in his famous 1893 lecture "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," the frontier was a quintessential American affair that shaped the national character in terms of democratic government, opportunity, and individualism (Turner 1893). Together with the concept of Manifest Destiny – the idea that the United States has a divine mission to settle the North American continent in the name of progress and liberty – the Frontier Myth was central to the idea of American exceptionalism: a benevolent country committed to the expansion of equality and freedom.

These positive stories about the uniqueness of American expansionism hid the brutal realities of the settler colonial project in the United States, for instance the violent displacement of Native American peoples and the central role of the plantation (as an agricultural business and a socioeconomic model) in the settlement of North America. The so-called cotton frontier spread westward in the southeastern parts of the North American continent during the early nineteenth century, leading to the establishment of Deep South slave states like Mississippi (1817) and Alabama (1819). Although the Plantation Myth, much like the Frontier Myth, emphasized benevolence (the gentility of the planter class and the organic work relations between master and enslaved), the actuality of the plantation labor regime was in fact much less benign. It was a system based on brute force and the ruthless exploitation of enslaved laborers and the environment alike (Johnson 2013; Rothman 2005). Old-growth forests were cut down to make room for plantation farming. "There were oaks and cypresses, sweet gum and leafy cottonwood, persimmon and pecan, walnut, and maple. Cane grew to great heights to make an impenetrable jungle. Vines and creepers laced and interlaced in intricate tangle. Here was an animal's paradise of bear, deer, opossum, raccoon, rabbit, squirrel, panther, and mink," author David Cohn reflected on the Mississippi Delta's state of nature before the planters came. But that all began to change once they heard about the area's farming opportunities. "Rumors of the fertility of the soil of the Delta, then called 'the swamps,' began to drift back to Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and South Carolina," Cohn explained. "Planters made inquiries about this virgin land inhabited by only a few Indians, fugitives from justice, and wild animals. Then they purchased huge tracts and came with armies of slaves to clear the ground and open plantations along the rivers and on the creeks" (Cohn 1935). Cohn described the Delta – his home region – as *terra nullius* subsequently settled and cultivated by planters through enslaved labour.

Despite the claim that the frontier was a uniquely North American (or more specifically, U.S.) experience, in other colonized spaces plantations similarly functioned as frontier outposts destined to cultivate land and (indigenous) people. An example is the Dutch East Indies, where colonial officer Johannes van den Bosch purchased the plantation Soedimara on western Java in the early nineteenth century. Like Cohn, Van den Bosch characterized the land surrounding his new farm as an empty

wildland that he brought under control through cultivation. In a similar vein, he "taught" local people to perform agricultural work, because all they did was "waste their time" (Sens 2019, 86). Van den Bosch used both free and enslaved labor for rice production on his plantation. In 1810, he returned to the Netherlands. After being captured by the British on his journey home and spending two years in England as a prisoner of war, he finally arrived in the Netherlands in 1813, where he fought against the French occupation forces on behalf of the provisional Dutch government. After Napoleon's defeat in 1815, Van den Bosch continued his military work for the newly established Kingdom of the Netherlands until 1818, when he founded the Society of Benevolence. The objective of this organization was to come up with a proper solution for the immense and widespread poverty problem the Netherlands was dealing with after the Napoleonic era.

The philosophy behind the Society appeared to be quite simple: transport the urban poor to the countryside and teach them agricultural skills there so they eventually would be able to take care of themselves (De Clercq 2018, 16-18). The idea of the industrious, land-tilling farmer as the epitome of virtuous citizenship was of course not new, nor was it limited to the Netherlands – or Europe, for that matter. "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens," American planter-politician Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1785. "They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bonds" (Jefferson 1785). Such thoughts already motivated Van den Bosch during his time as a colonial agent and planter in the East Indies and he brought those experiences with him when he started the Society of Benevolence. Van den Bosch chose the province of Drenthe as the starting point for his agricultural colonies. Nineteenth-century writers described Drenthe as a boggy wasteland, inhabited only by heather, moss, snails, water insects and swamp birds, a solitary hare, a small number of shepherds (if the soil was not too miry for grazing sheep), and a few hunters (Van der Woud 1998, 213). For Van den Bosch, the remote hinterlands of Drenthe were the ideal location for his civilizing mission. Through the swampification of these hinterlands, they were rendered as "uninhabitable spaces of death and disease" (to use the words of Vickers) ready for destruction through the transformation into farmland. The Colonies of Benevolence thus constituted a dual cultivation effort: "useless" poor would be turned into virtuous citizens by making them turn "useless" swamps into productive fields.

Anthropologist Albert Schrauwers points out how Van den Bosch applied his plantation knowledge in the design and implementation of the Colonies of Benevolence. On Soedimara, he (or better, the people who worked for him) had successfully drained swampy land through the construction of a canal, turning wetland into profitable wet-rice fields. As the antithesis of swamp ecosystems, the plantation model of agriculture, based on coerced labor, served as the blueprint for the Colonies of Benevolence (Schrauwers 2020, 358-359). The architecture of colony towns like Frederiksoord and

Veenhuizen follows typical plantation layouts, with straight lines and open fields that brought a sense of order to the landscape and enabled surveillance of the labor force. The domestic colonies of the Society of Benevolence thus constitute a manifestation of the "imperial boomerang" Michel Foucault wrote about. Europeans implemented their models (like plantation farming) in the colonies, but these templates sometimes traveled back to Europe, as was the case with Van den Bosch's settlements in the Drenthe wilderness. "A whole series of colonial models was brought back to the West, and the result was that the West could practice something resembling colonization, or an internal colonialism, on itself," according to Foucault (qtd. in Graham 2013).

The Colonies of Benevolence are located in the western parts of Drenthe. In the east of the province, on the border with neighboring Groningen, lie the Peat Colonies (Veenkoloniën in Dutch). Although they share the moniker "colonial" with the Society towns, their purpose was rather different. Instead of Van den Bosch's civilizing mission, the Peat Colonies' primary purpose was moneymaking. As the name already indicates, the Peat Colonies were rich in peat, an important source of fuel until the early twentieth century. Before the peat cutters arrived, the area was a rugged wetland named the Bourtange Moor. Starting in the 1600s, peat cutting operations slowly moved diagonally in a southeastern direction, toward the German border. Large groups of laborers from different parts of the transnational region and the country dug canals to drain the swamp and extract the peat, which was then transported to the big cities in the western Netherlands. The drained moor became farmland. Large-scale agriculture nowadays dominates the plantation-like landscape, with big farms, vast fields, and straight roads and canals – an orderly environment that stands in stark contrast to the swamp it once was. Not much is left of the Bourtange Moor. Bargerveen Nature Reserve is one of the few small patches of wetland that survived the colonization efforts by the peat-cutting business.

During the 1850s, provincial government officials and newspapers in Drenthe regularly employed American frontier rhetoric to describe the economic opportunities the Bourtange Moor offered, echoing settler colonial narratives about journeying to the Promised Land (Veracini 2024, 114). Politicians and journalists alike spoke and wrote about "Drenthe's California," making comparisons with the goldrush that was happening in the United States around the same time. They thought peat reservoirs worth millions of guilders were waiting to be dug up, providing land and a solid income to thousands of settlers. In 1868, reporter Harm Boon from the provincial capital of Assen gave his prediction for the future of the Peat Colonies: the rise of a major industrial metropolis comparable to the manufacturing towns in England, with factories, tall chimneys, the overwhelming noise of steam-driven machines, and streets lit by gas lanterns. Besides such visions of modernity, the treasure of the moorlands was also depicted in gendered terms. The regional newspaper *Provinciaal Drentsche en*

Asser Courant of 9 July 1853 for instance labeled the moor a "Veenbruid" or Fenland Bride, a virgin territory ready to be penetrated in order to reap its benefits (Visscher 2001).

Although similarities exist between colonial settlement patterns outside the Netherlands and the examples discussed above, obvious differences should not be ignored. An important distinction between settler colonies such as the United States and Australia and domestic colonial projects in the Dutch North is that large-scale elimination of (specifically racialized) native populations did not occur within the Netherlands. If we take a multispecies perspective, however, a different set of eliminatory practices becomes visible. Multispecies scholars want to move away from human-centered approaches and in doing so, intend to reframe "political questions: how do colonialism, capitalism, and their associated unequal power relations play out within a broader web of life?" (Van Doren, Kirksey, and Münster 2016, 3). From the sixteenth century onward, large-scale peat cutting almost completely erased the Bourtange Moor, a unique and expansive wetland ecosystem that took thousands of years to form – it once stretched for three thousand square kilometers, while Bargerveen totals a mere twenty square kilometers today.

In *Settler Ecologies*, Charis Enns and Brock Bersaglio examine the impact of settler colonialism on ecological relations in Kenya. Their objective is to demonstrate "how both of the defining characteristics of settler colonialism… – its logic of elimination and its endurance – are extended through the more-than-human world, resulting in the ongoing erasure and replacement of existing ecological relations with those of use and value to settler colonialism" (Enns and Bersaglio 2024, 13). What is the added value of such a multispecies approach to settler colonial studies, in particular related to the study of domestic colonization in the Dutch North, and which pitfalls loom by taking such an approach? In a critical discussion of the Plantationocene, a concept that emphasizes the massive impact of large-scale, plantation-like farming on issues such as global warming, species extinction, and climate change, geographer Janae Davis and her colleagues warned for a "flattened multispecies ontology – where difference between and among forms of life is obscured." On the basis of such an ontology, "multispecies assemblages of 'plants, animals, microbes, and people…' are flattened and simply appear as cogs in the wheels of capitalist destruction" (Davis et al 2019, 5). Davis and her co-authors are primarily concerned that understanding the Plantationocene through a multispecies lens obscures the racial politics that dictates a significant part of plantation life: "an interest in ecological ethics must not overshadow attention to the dynamics of power (racial, gender, sexual, or otherwise)," they write (Davis et al 2019, 10).

Without neglecting critical distinctions between plantation agriculture in the (former) colonies and its boomerang effects in Europe, it is hard to deny how internal colonialism had a devastating effect on the other-than-human world. In her non-fiction work *Fen, Bog & Swamp*, novelist Annie Proulx

exposes the systemic destruction of wetlands in the name of progress. "Today as the climate crisis begins to bite and the swelling numbers of the most populous mammal on the planet – 7.8 billion people – continues to grow some recognize that it is our ever-expanding human works and vast mechanized agriculture that have flattened the wilderness and introduce us to ever-new micro-organisms, while in the last fifty years more than half of the bird, mammal and amphibian populations have dwindled into memory or teeter on the edge of the extinction cliff," Proulx writes (Proulx 2022, 15) Such eliminatory practices operate on a continuum of histories between external and domestic colonialism. Political scientist Barbara Arneil deconstructs the supposed binary between internal colonization and (settler) colonialism overseas. She sees both forms of colonization as "*common* nodes within **transnational colonial networks**" and domestic colonies as "sites constituted by the **intersection of different colonialism(s)**, including… settler and/or radical colonialism" (Arneil 2017, 222). Globally operating models, partly springing from (settler) colonialism, inspired resource extraction and settlement in specific zones of the northern Netherlands. A plantation mindset and a frontier mentality led to the creation of outposts to bring the swampy wilderness of the Dutch North under human control.

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Settler Colonialism as a Structure?

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Contested 'Modernities', Unaccepted Intermediaries? In Between-men in Settler Colonial Settings from the Levant

Karène Sanchez Summerer

From the very outset of settler colonialism, intermediaries played a crucial yet contested role, navigating between colonial powers, local societies, and transnational networks. In the early 20th century Levant, certain individuals (primarily men from non-majority population groups, and more rarely women) held unique linguistic and cultural resources that allowed them to mediate between imperial structures and local communities. While deeply rooted in their own societies, these intermediaries cultivated perspectives that extended beyond their immediate surroundings, enabling them to function as essential brokers in proto-national movements, colonial governance, trade, education, and diplomacy.

Mediation occurred not only across the Mediterranean but also within these societies themselves, (at times within a very same religious institution) shaping interactions between various social, religious, and political groups. These intermediaries, or 'in-between figures,' (Heyberger & Verdeil 2009) straddled multiple worlds, facilitating negotiations, adapting ideas, and often challenging rigid colonial binaries. Despite their indispensable role, they remained ambiguous and, at times, unaccepted, as both colonial authorities and (proto)nationalist movements viewed them with suspicion, questioning their loyalties and allegiances.

How to define this/ these group(s) of 'intermediaries', its delimitations and its (un)porous boundaries in a (settler) colonial setting? What were their multifaceted role in the settler colonial structures and their role in shaping, challenging, transforming these structures? To what extent were they essential at a macro, miso and micro levels? What were the points of contact/ connections/ interactions/ impact in the settlers' homeland?

Adopting a micro-historical approach, this short study does not answer these broader questions but examines points of contact, networks, and power dynamics that shaped the role of intermediaries in the colonial Levant settings (i.e. here the British and French Mandates Levant, 1918-1948). Focusing on two atypical figures of brokers, it explores how these figures functioned within and against colonial institutions, shedding light on broader questions of agency, contested modernities, and the limits of colonial control. The discussion focuses on two case studies from Ottoman and Mandate Palestine (1900–1937), illustrating how these brokers navigated between different socio-political spheres and how their presence complicates traditional narratives of settler colonialism and indigenous resistance.

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This short analysis intends to contribute to the historiographical debate on settler colonialism by addressing some of its limitations in acknowledging intermediaries, the complex role of these mediators who shaped, to a certain extent, colonial rule and nationalist movements. Yet it is necessary to integrate more intermediary figures into the study of colonial structures to better understand the fluidity of power, identity, and cultural exchanges that took place in the early 20th century Levant.

The Structural Role of Intermediaries in the Levant's Colonial Context and the 'In-Between' Problem in Settler Colonial Narratives

Settler colonial theory has traditionally emphasized the binary opposition between settlers and indigenous populations, focusing on the logic of elimination and the structural domination of settler regimes (Wolfe, 2006). However, this framework often overlooked the role of intermediaries, individuals who navigated the complex political, economic, and cultural landscapes of these societies, mediating between colonial authorities, local communities, and transnational networks (Lawrance, Osborn, & Roberts, 2015). These intermediaries (such as merchants, translators, educators, and bureaucrats) were both essential and contested figures in colonial governance, contributing to the functioning of settler states while often being perceived as unreliable or suspect by both colonizers and indigenous populations (Ben-Bassat & Büssow, 2011; Eldar, 2018). Their presence challenges the rigid categories of settler vs. native, revealing a more nuanced colonial landscape where power was diffused through layered and shifting allegiances (Schayegh, 2013; Khalidi, 2006).

Recent scholarship has begun to address this gap by examining the agency of intermediaries in shaping colonial rule and nationalist movements. Figures like Albert Antebi and Niqula Khoury (Sanchez Summerer, 2022; Irving, Nassif, & Sanchez Summerer, 2022) exemplify how local actors could leverage their positions to negotiate between empire and community in Ottoman Great Syria, yet their contributions have been largely sidelined. The rigid application of settler colonial structures theory to the Levant context often fails to account for the persistence of intercommunal ties, economic entanglements, and cultural brokerage, which were central to the experiences of these intermediaries (Campos, 2011; Evri, 2019; Smith, 2021). Additionally, the legal and administrative spaces occupied by intermediaries, whether within Mandate bureaucracies, educational institutions, or trade networks, complicate simplistic notions of colonial domination and indigenous resistance (Elkins & Pedersen, 2005; Cavanagh & Veracini, 2017).

By incorporating intermediaries into the analysis, we gain a more dynamic understanding of colonial governance, one that accounts for fluid identities, contested modernities, and alternative forms of resistance and collaboration (for ex. Tamari, 2004; Wallach, 2017, and the 'Arab Ashkenazi project',

forthcoming; Sanchez Summerer 2022). Exploring how intermediaries functioned as agents of cultural transmission, political negotiation, and economic transformation in settler colonial settings across the Middle East (Vilmain, 2022; Fishman, 2021, for ex.) and beyond, allows us to understand the multifaceted perceived loyalty vs. real agency.

Intermediaries indeed often had their own agendas, using their position not just for colonial administration but also for self-advancement and communal negotiation. Their positions were often unstable, often subject to colonial backlash, resentment of their own communities, or shifts in power structures.

Albert Antebi and Niqula Khoury, Arab Jew and Orthodox Arab Intermediaries?

Albert Abraham Antebi (Ibrahim Entaibi in Arabic in some sources) was animated by the desire to '*régénérer les Orientaux par les Orientaux*' (regenerating Orientals/ Easterners by Orientals/ Easterners themselves) and 'strengthen Mediterranean resistance' to a German model in the Levant. Originally from the Jewish community of Damascus, director of the AIU (Alliance Israélite Universelle) vocational school in Jerusalem from 1896 until 1913, vice-president of the Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce, Antebi was also a community leader in Ottoman Jerusalem, an engineer, the representative of the Jewish Colonisation Association (ICA) from 1899 to 1913, land buyer for Baron Edmond de Rothschild and for the Lovers of Zion (founded in Russia in the 1880s to encourage emigration to Palestine), advisor to Cemal Pasha from early 1915 to October 1916, friend of Meir Dizengoff (founder and first mayor of Tel Aviv) and of Said Effendi al-Husayni (mayor of Jerusalem 1902–6 and deputy to the Ottoman Parliament), godfather of Amin el Husayni (the later Haj Amin), 'liberator' of David Ben Gurion and Isaac Ben Zvi, soldier of Mustafa Kemal and dragoman of the French embassy in Constantinople.

Analysing the imperial Ottoman and the British, French and German colonial structures via the complex experiences of Albert Antebi offers a glimpse into the porous boundaries of cultural identification, the role of some of these intermediaries in Ottoman/ early Mandate Palestine. His enormous personal correspondence and the AIU archives help tracing and questioning the imperial and proto-national policies, the French paradigm through which he continued to perceive the local and transnational situation of Palestine and to examine his complex positioning towards the proto-national scenes in Ottoman and British Mandate Palestine. They highlight the ways in which Antebi saw the entangled relations within which he existed in Palestine in the first two decades of the twentieth century: through Franco-German national and cultural competition in the region; the contest between cultural

and political or 'Oriental' and European schools of Zionist thought; and economic-cultural versus political-national models of Jewish integration into the wider society of the Ottoman Levant.

In a period when identifications were fluid and loyalties sometimes overlapping, the figure of Antebi lies between exclusive identification modes (for example, religious groups) and inclusive ones (Ottomanism or local urban identities like Jerusalemite). This is rendered even more complex by his positioning within different groups, as he was never fully integrated into either the governing AIU elite from France or the Sephardic elites in Jerusalem.

Antebi's colonising activities are incomprehensible without recalling that the First Aliyah was partially influenced by French Jews. Albert Antebi was an expert at the crossroads of the two legal orders of Ottoman Jerusalem (the reformed Ottoman law of the Tanzimat period and Capitulations law). As an expert in Ottoman land law, he became an indispensable interlocutor for reform-minded Ottoman officials and a skilful practitioner in the provincial institutions. He also became an essential intermediary for the French consuls in Jerusalem, an expert on the status of consular protection in the field of Jewish institutions and individuals.

From his correspondence with the AIU, a trans-community of sociability between Ottoman Jerusalem elites appears: the Arab Muslim aristocracy of Jerusalem seems to have had no objection to sending their children to Alliance schools, and Jewish notables did the same with the Christian missionary schools. Yet, after 1913, more rigid lines were drawn between certain affiliations and Antebi became an unwanted figure to many in the Jerusalem landscape.

The second case study is of an Arab orthodox priest from a very humble family from Ottoman Palestine. In the summer of 1937, in the midst of the Palestinian uprising against British rule, the possibility of partitioning Palestine between Jews and Arabs shifted from a marginal proposal to a very real prospect. After the Peel Commission report that year, the League of Nations and its Mandates Commission debated the notion of partition at the former's Geneva headquarters. The Arab Palestinian nationalist movement dispatched a number of delegates to Switzerland, amongst them the Greek Orthodox priest, educator and campaigner Niqula Khoury.

Khoury's memoirs, written in the early 1950s but long ignored in an archive in Beirut, depict a Palestinian clergyman, educator and nationalist and offer a personal perspective on the regional impacts of the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the Palestinian struggle for self-determination under British colonialism and political Zionism. As a priest of the Orthodox Church (as well as the son and grandson of Orthodox priests), Khoury was a high-profile and energetic agitator against the domination of the Orthodox Church in Palestine by the Greek hierarchy, a movement rooted in the nineteenth century and in the Nahda (often referred to as the 'Arab renaissance'), positioning Christian Orthodox communities within Arab nationalism. The manuscript itself was apparently written in Lebanon in the 1950s or the

early 1960s, shortly before Niqula Khoury's death in 1964. We thus do not have explicit details of Khoury's 'autobiographical pact' (Lejeune & Elger and Köse, 2010), the mutual understanding with his putative reader of the nature of the story he would tell and their relationship to his self-presentation. But almost forty years earlier, Niqula Khoury and his cousin Shehadeh had published a history of the Orthodox Church in Palestine which became an important document in the battle of representations and narratives within the greater war for control of the Greek Orthodox Church and its resources in the region. He was thus well aware of the potential value of a written account and its impact on wider discourse.

Khoury was also deeply opposed to splitting the territory of Palestine between Jews and Arabs. As he travelled across the Balkans, he visited senior members of the Orthodox churches in Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria to ask them for support in Geneva, during the League of Nations debates. The details of his trip highlight the links and contestations within and across the Orthodox world and going beyond Greece and Russia as the main Orthodox state actors. His account of the Geneva conference itself is also a rare window on Palestinian participation in the international negotiations whose outcomes were imposed on the Palestinian people in a disastrous form. The diplomatic means he used to attract support and challenge the plans of a Great Power via alternative networks of power and loyalty, shed light on the ideas and strategies that the Palestinian nationalist movement was utilizing at the time (see extract below, at the end of this short article).

Figures like Albert Antebi and Niqula Khoury exemplify how Levantine intermediaries negotiated the tensions inherent to the colonial settings, using their linguistic, social, and political capital to bridge the gap between Ottoman authorities, British colonial powers, and local communities. They served as cultural translators, educators, and to some extent record keepers, 'filtering' colonial policies for local communities while simultaneously influencing how colonial authorities understood the region. However, this process was fraught with tension. While Khoury seems to have reinforced colonial stereotypes (sometimes for self-preservation or career advancement), Antebi actively shaped alternative narratives, resisting colonial interpretations of governance. Some of the challenges they faced are valid for the settler colonial structures context: at times accused of distorting information or being mere extensions of some of the colonial interests, to colonial rulers, they appeared as 'too indigenous', too embedded in local networks to be fully trusted. To their own communities, they were viewed by some with scepticism or even resentment for their proximity to colonial power structures. This double alienation highlights the precarious nature of their roles, while their knowledge and expertise were valuable, they remained vulnerable to political shifts and ideological battles over cultural and national identification.

Intermediaries also reveal the limits of settler colonial control. British and French Mandate authorities struggled to manage figures who did not fit neatly into clear categories, as these intermediaries often navigated multiple allegiances and complex social positions. Many of them did not simply enforce colonial rule but also challenged it from within, who contributed to nationalist thought and cultural resistance. Some participated in nationalist movements while still holding administrative or diplomatic roles within Mandate structures.

Moreover, modernity/ies in the colonial Levant was deeply contested, and intermediaries were at the centre of these debates. Their efforts to promote hybrid forms (for ex. for urban planning, education, and legal reforms) were frequently delegitimized. Their agency and their role in shaping alternative, locally grounded visions of modernity/ies, that did not conform to either colonial or nationalist orthodoxies, their fluid loyalties of intermediaries allow for a more nuanced understanding of power relations in settler colonial structures and encourage us to rethink certain categories, to recognize the complex negotiations, compromises, and contestations that shaped colonial (and postcolonial) societies.

Conclusion

The role of intermediaries in settler colonial structures challenges conventional narratives that have long framed colonial encounters as a stark binary between settlers and indigenous populations. Intermediaries, a group far from being monolithic indeed, whether bureaucrats, educators, traders, or political actors, shaped and contested colonial governance, navigating the complex intersections between imperial administrations, local communities, and transnational networks. Their presence complicates the rigid structures of colonial rules, revealing how power was negotiated. While often perceived as ambiguous or suspect, these figures were pivotal agents of cultural transmission, economic exchange, and political brokerage, adapting and redefining their positions based on shifting colonial and nationalist dynamics.

Their experiences offer valuable insights into how colonial and indigenous actors coexisted, collaborated, and clashed, shaping the development of modern nation-states and identity formations. The study of intermediaries invites us to move beyond static categorizations, recognizing the fluidity of power and the agency of individuals who operated within, between, and beyond colonial frameworks. By applying micro-historical approaches and transregional perspectives, we can uncover the nuanced ways in which intermediaries facilitated, contested, and even subverted colonial agendas, the porous nature of colonial boundaries, where collaboration, adaptation, and opposition coexisted. They enrich our understanding of the complex human landscapes that characterized colonial rule and the struggles

over governance, identification, and cultural heritage. Uncovering these neglected figures is a necessary step in reclaiming the agency of those who operated in the interstices of empires and settler colonial structures.

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A Bright Future for Settler Colonialism? Fantasies on the Colonisation of Outer Space in a Historical Perspective.

Clemens Six

13 October 2024 was a decisive moment in the history of astronautics. On that day, SpaceX, Elon Musk's private space agency, launched a rocket into earth orbit and, for the first time ever, succeeded in redirecting the booster rocket back to the launching station. The spacecraft called Starship and its carrier system, Super Heavy, are a "fully reusable transportation system designed to carry both crew and cargo" to four destinations: a space station, earth orbit, the Moon, and, finally, Mars. The ultimate goal of these space travels is to make "life multiplanetary" (SpaceX homepage). Rocket reusability is a key technology not only to ferry scientific equipment, supplies, and humans to the Moon, to Mars and beyond but also to make the idea of outer space settlement easier to realise. The enthusiasm about this achievement was thus understandable. Former Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield, reflecting the sentiment of many, saw in it "an enormous step forward in human capability", a step that made him "even more excited for our collective future" (The Guardian 2024). Three months later, President Trump announced in his inaugural speech that planting the American flag on Mars will help to pursue his nation's "manifest destiny", a term originating from white supremacist thinking in the 19th-century United States (Gómez 2018).

It remains to be seen how collective or national this future in space will indeed be or, probably more realistic from today's point of view, whether space travel will remain a form of elitist escapism in the foreseeable future (Rushkoff 2023). In any case, fantasies around human settlement in space have a long and diverse history both in science and in literature. Although the current enthusiasm about new forms of space travel insinuates an altogether new era of outer space discovery leading beyond human history as we know it, the terms space colonisation and space settlement indicate an entanglement of contemporary space-related fantasies with the troubled history of modern (European) empires. If nothing else, this vocabulary seems to suggest ideological and practical continuities of such imperial patterns in recent approaches to the human conquest of outer space.

Interestingly, some scholars of a science of human space settlement are aware of such (possible) continuities but reject any sort of negative associations of space endeavours with colonisation and (violence-prone) settlement "as these other sites (in outer space) are uninhabited by people" (Smith 2019, 6). On similar lines, they criticise the term colonisation in this context because it would focus on ideology and imply policies of dominance and repression towards indigenous communities unknown in outer space (Haqq-Misra 2023, 14-15).

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In what follows, I develop the exact opposite argument. Fantasies around outer space expansion and settlement are not only a continuation of settler colonial tropes but, ultimately, their historical completion in two respects: They promise absolute sovereignty that communities aimed for before but never achieved; and, in the long run, they envision the foundation of a new civilisation not only in cultural but also evolutionary terms. The claim that space settlement is not a form of settler colonialism because there are no indigenous communities in outer space to be massacred to achieve control over land confuses settler colonialism's means with its end. Historically, the relationship between the extinction of local communities and settler colonialism is multi-facetted and frequently indeed intrinsic (Wolfe 2006; Mamdani 2020). But it is important not to equate the elimination of people with the settlers' main objective, namely to occupy 'virgin' land in order to realise specific forms of social, economic, and political utopias in this supposedly empty space (Veracini 2021). In that sense, assimilating or even eliminating local communities is a strategy to achieve a goal, not the goal itself. To argue that there are no indigenous communities (yet) in outer space and therefore, comparisons with settler colonialism are inadequate, is beside the point of settler colonialism as a historical phenomenon.

Contemporary fantasies about outer space settlement are not only a continuation and adaptation of settler colonial tropes, they radicalise them and pursue their historical culmination in a utopian future that lies beyond the established coordinates of time and space. Four aspects illustrate this point. First, outer space is the most ideal and purest manifestation of virgin land, the core desire of settler colonial aspirations and longing. Settler colonialism literature discusses this central motive of empty land with the concept of *terra nullius*, originally a codification of mutual rights and obligations among European powers competing with each other in their overseas territories (Wolfe 2006, 391; Wolfe 1999, 26-27). In the current discussions around space expansionism, outer space manifests a *terra nullius* par excellence.

Second, the settlement beyond the Earth's orbit offers the long-term prospect of absolute sovereignty. This notion of sovereignty is not only a complete disentanglement from all earthly matters including the existing legal, political, and economic relations but also from the notion of human history as such. It creates the opportunity for an altogether different civilisation released from the confines and flaws of what humans have created so far on Earth.

Third, in outer space, the formation of an alternative social body surpasses the creation of a new social order and a new collective identity, as seen in historical forms of settler colonialism. Settlement in outer space envisions a new social body shaped by biological and psychological mutation, enabling space settlers to diverge from humanity and human history not only culturally but also evolutionary.

And finally, expansion into non-earthly space entices with the prospect of completing capitalism's deepest and most existential aspirations: unhindered and unlimited resource extraction and a truly endless accumulation of capital and wealth.

To make these observations more concrete, I discuss below in more detail three space settlement tropes as I found them in recent scientific and popular literature published in Western, particularly US-American academia.

Settler trope 1: externalising earthly problems

In the modern era, and possibly even earlier, settler colonialism was driven by externalisation dynamics through which societies and economies reallocated socio-economic problems to new territories and social contexts. Outmigration that facilitated the establishment of new settlements abroad was frequently fuelled by economic despair, different manifestations of social exclusion based on ethnicity, religion, or other forms of culture, and (forced) displacement in the context of violent conflict (Veracini 2021). Debates around human settlement in Earth orbit and in outer space take up this trope, radicalise it, and transform it from a historical-analytical argument into a justification for the expansion into outer space. Specific to our times, these debates contain a new layer of apocalyptic dystopia grounded in the expectations of ecology-induced civilisational collapse.

A first argument concerns the general risk for mankind living on one single planet with no escape to any other celestial body. As astronomic events such as a meteorite impact have already altered the history of the blue planet in profound ways, it appears almost as a "moral imperative" (Green 2019, 37) for humans to expand as quickly as possible beyond Earth. This imperative entails the moral principle that humankind must exist as otherwise morality itself would die together with the human species. Building on the influential writings of US-American planetary scientist Carl Sagan (1934-1996) and various forms of escapism into outer space formulated during the Cold War era (Vettese & Pendergrass 2022, 22-26), recent fantasies propagate the idea of "extra-terrestrial settlement" as the *only* way for humans to avoid extinction. These settlements are framed as "universal shelters" to re-establish civilization and secure the survival of humanity on a multiplanetary scale (Haqq-Misra et al 2022, 23).

Among the many scenarios that could potentially lead to human annihilation, ecological (self-)destruction stands out. Some observers remain vague in their speculations about environmental disasters and their catastrophic impact. They include 'natural' disasters harming economies on a large scale, bad management of available resources, over-dependency of societies on foreign resources, and a general lack of adaptation to changing ecological circumstances (Salotti 2015, 11). Others, though,

are more specific. In their view, self-inflicted ecological collapse on earth is not only a possibility of the coming decades, but a realistic, even unavoidable fate of the Earth System with devastating consequences for human civilisation (Tiwari 2001; Szocik et al 2020b). In a way, one could argue that these collapse scenarios provide science with the most compelling justification, even an imperative for outer space settlement.

Related to ecological collapse, some observers expect social collapse to happen on earth in the nearby future (Barker 2015). This would mean that, initiated by the breakdown of ecological systems and its far-reaching consequences for economic activities including food production, societies would lose their institutional and cultural complexities leading to an irreversible breakdown of adaptation capacity and large-scale violence. In this context, the urge to establish a new society and a new social order on, for example, Mars gains immediate urgency.

In the light of such horrific scenarios, scholars try to address further questions about people's possible motivations to emigrate from Earth. While some ask, in comparison to Australian colonisation, how voluntary space settlement will actually be (Szocik et al 2020a, 6), other commentators dream of a new social order that unifies people of diverse backgrounds, reinstates equality among individuals, and, ultimately, completes the 500-year history of frontier expansionism (Tutton 2017). Similar to the Georgia Colony (1732-1750), a colonial settlement in the US South, space settlement is supposed to become a "social experiment" creating "a perfect society" (Szocik et al 2020a, 6). American settlers framed the Georgian swamps and forests as a "paradise with all her virgin beauties" (Bartley 1990, Chapter One; also Stewart 2002), empty lands hostile to humans but full of riches to be conquered and, ultimately, converted into the homeland of a new, ordered, and pious society. While these tropes of social utopia have been a defining element of settler colonialism since ancient times, the diagnosis of a world-wide, ecology-induced social collapse as a justification for resettlement is new and it is specific to outer space fantasies in the Anthropocene, i.e., the cluster of ecological destructions caused by human activity that picked up speed and scope after 1945 and thus called by some historians the "great acceleration" (McNeill & Engelke 2016).

Settler trope 2: Towards a new civilisation (or: What is outer space anthropology?)

Settler colonial endeavours have always been a combination of two seemingly contradictory approaches: (violent) attempts to subordinate the new spaces to the political imaginations and socio-economic interests of the settlers; and adaptation efforts towards the new ecological, geographical, and economic contexts through a variety of civilisational techniques which the settlers brought with them and adjusted to the immediate requirements of their new surroundings.

Outer space anthropology is an interdisciplinary research field that can also be understood as adaptation science. Its purpose is to figure out how life beyond Earth's orbit can adjust itself to extremely hostile atmospheric and ecological circumstances in order to survive beyond the life-span of one single generation. This discussion concerns the biological, social, cultural, and psychological aspects of human existence. In other words, scientific speculations about outer space settlement can also be seen as contributions to an "adaptive evolution" (Smith 2019, 6) towards the multiplanetary existence and long-term survival of humanity. In that light, outer space fantasies radicalise settler colonial adaptation strategies towards a complete reinvention of the human species including its psychological and genetic setup. Under the circumstances of a relocation of life outside the established ecological settings on earth, social engineering matures into biological engineering. Consequently, the total production of space as an entirely new habitat for humans translates into the total (re)design of the human subject (Scharmen 2021). This would not simply be the dawn of a new era within human history but it would establish an altogether new notion of history.

It is not without irony that, on the one hand, scientific-intellectual circles around tech-billionaires speculate with admirable meticulousness about how to escape the many forms of apocalypse on earth, particularly in the form of an ecological-social collapse. At the same time, these tech-entrepreneurs and their companies contribute themselves significantly to this collapse (Oxfam 2023).

In terms of practical conduct, outer space settlement is confronted with a wide range of problems that make human existence beyond the earth a complex endeavour. Already towards the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, NASA drafted an "evolutionary approach" to expand humanity into the solar system starting from the low earth orbit (LEO) to the Moon, on to Mars and further expand from there into outer space (Fairchild & Roberts 1989). The main idea behind this evolutionary logic was to give humans the opportunity to gradually adjust their adaptation strategies, thereby optimise their adaptation capabilities, and, ultimately, reach a stage of outer space sovereignty that disconnects these new settlements more or less entirely from earth.

More recently, speculations on outer space settlement dream about an "autonomous civilisation rather than an extension of civilisation on Earth" and extend this vision towards "planetary statehood" as an assembly of equal planetary states bound together in a new setup of interplanetary relations and rules (Haqq-Misra 2023, Chapter 8, esp. 185-187). Strikingly, in these discussions such relations are usually framed as non-violent or even non-conflictual. Historical experience suggests otherwise, though. There seems to be plenty of potential for conflict, even outright war over precious resources and diverging economic interests.

In order to realise space settlement as a place where "people go to work, live, and, for those who wish, raise their kids" (Globus 2017, 2), momentous problems need to be overcome. This includes

complex technological infrastructure to facilitate food production (Puumala et al 2023, 5, Cannon and Britt 2019); erect living spaces subdivided into zones that correspond with the different elements of human existence comparable to how "early explorers" established their agriculture, manufacturing, and industry in their new settlements (Alamoudi et al 2022, 22-25); a closely monitored gender-ratio to keep reproduction in balance (Tiwari 2021); and a form of governance profoundly different from the political struggles on earth. Elon Musk, who, unlike Jeff Bezos, is not only concerned with more room for humans to prosper but centrally feels like a messiah to save mankind from extinction (Scharmen 2021, 191), imagines this outer space governmentality as "direct democracy" based on the two key elements of meritocracy and technocracy (Haqq-Misra et al 2022, 27-28). Bezos, on the other hand, does not expect any systemic alternatives to evolve in outer space but thinks of outer space settlement largely as a reflection of earthly political and economic relations. What both Bezos and Musk share, though, is a libertarian-conservative vision of outer space settlement (Weinersmith 2023) which reflects and exacerbates their current involvements in earthly relations to transform both the economy and increasingly also the state according to their corporate interests. What is more, these two personalities illustrate that utopian visions on new settlements in virgin spaces can also be fostered by elites rather than the settlers themselves, who frequently belonged to lower and middle classes.

A particularly fascinating, yet underacknowledged aspect of space colonisation is the psychology of long-distance space travel and a life in extremely cramped housing in an ecologically hostile environment. These psychological considerations are increasingly prominent in the literature suggesting that a settlement on Mars will also, probably even primarily, require the psychological-mental adaptation as a central feature of a new civilisation (Szocik et al 2020a, Szocik 2019, Szocik ed. 2019; Fairchild & Roberts 1989, 234). How such an adaptation can be achieved and which concrete measures can be undertaken to accelerate this process, is largely unclear. But there are two important ethical questions resulting from this problem: How can outer space entrepreneurs and settlers justify the psychological costs these endeavours will have, particularly during the initial phase of this expansionism? And, in the light of these costs, is such a kind of life away from earth worth living and for who? The dream of "permanent epistemic change" (Haqq-Misra 2016, 64) in individuals and communities includes an unknown and unaddressed psychological impact that questions the very ethics of any such utopia.

Settler trope 3: Capitalism's ultimate frontier

Space X's breakthrough in October 2024 in the deployment of a reusable booster rocket contains many different innovations important for space travel and space settlement. The most important one is to

reduce the transportation costs into space and make the space endeavour profitable by transforming the rocket business into something similar to the aircraft one (The Economist 2024). The commercialisation of space travel through space tourism (Globus 2017, 30) or the establishment of an outer space real estate market (Ibid, 13) are meant to cover the significant costs of transportation beyond earthly gravity. Once the travel is profitable, space expansionism is meant to open up "a new frontier of innovation" (James 2018a, 3), provide access to the riches of space mining including minerals from asteroids and planets, and establish "a new space resource economy" (Ibid, 6; see also Zubrin 1996, Globus 2010). Such an economy is based on virtually endless resource extraction and, by extension, capital accumulation. Scholars argue since quite some time that, together with primitive accumulation, settler colonialism was a key ingredient in the expansion of capital in the (early) modern era (Lloyd & Wolfe 2016) and settler colonies served as important destinations for surpluses (Harvey 2003, 119). Outer space fantasies perpetuate this economic pattern and update it from the past into the future.

Design experiments such as the "Mars Manufacturing Settlement" called "Leominster" drafted by scholars of Mars Foundation and Mars University in the United States tried to find out how a Mars settlement can be made sustainable in a comprehensive sense: food production, energy supply including methane fuel production and nuclear energy, water production and extraction, 3D print of furniture, the production of plastic etc. The main economic purpose assumed in this experiment was the exportation of fluids and manufacturing products such as spacecraft frames, trusses, antennas, rocket motors, and even food from Mars to Earth (Mackenzie et al 2021). For critics, such settler colonisation ideas "repeat the pattern of colonies on Earth both with regard to their relations with the home planet and with the indigenous inhabitants where they exist" (Tower Sargent 2010, 203-204). There is, however, maturing enthusiasm among scientists and entrepreneurs about what might be unlimited riches outside earth orbit. Although largely unsubstantiated by concrete data, these aspirations also begin to interest private banks such as Goldman Sachs and space-mining companies such as The Moon Express (James 2018b, 70, 77; Mukundan et al 2023).

Unsurprisingly, these fantasies are frequently combined with an urgent call for state authorities to take distance and leave these market forces to themselves in their strive for the commercial treasures of outer space. As the argument goes, government agencies have achieved little or no profits since the Apollo mission. The "new space companies" such as SpaceX or Blue Origin, by contrast, have much clearer strategic goals, overwhelming financial power, and, as a consequence, higher risk tolerance. Taken together, these qualities would alter space exploration towards higher investment and potentially soaring profitability (Utrilla and Welch 2017). In brief, earthly capitalism is currently opening up its ultimate and, as it seems, also its final frontier.

Conclusions

These three settler tropes illustrate that there are numerous parallels and continuities between contemporary ideas of space settlement and the earthly experience with settler colonialism. In that sense, settler colonialism as a structure finds its continuation and also completion in the fantasies of human transformation towards a new civilisation in outer space and the creation of a space resource economy on a multiplanetary scale. Outer space settlement charges the established settler colonialism tropes with an apocalyptic dimension that combines a diagnosis of socio-ecological collapse on earth with an unshakable belief in technological progress as a realistic and timely way out, at least for a small part of mankind. In its predominant character as an imaginary of financial and academic elites, however, climate change escapism is different from previous forms of settler colonialism which recruited strongly among lower and middle classes.

This reasoning is not without cynicism. Instead of supporting humanity to devote all its energy and resources to prevent collapse and self-destruction, it delivers lofty space fantasies ultimately based on the acceptance of mass starvation and mass death on earth. In doing so, it perpetuates the historical framing of nature as an object of human control and a source of extraction and exploitation that current debates around the Anthropocene and planetary history seek to overcome through a more integrated understanding of nature and culture. In that light, these "childish dreams" (Deudney 2020, 367) around settler colonialism in outer space are epistemically a conservative, even backward-looking utopia about the future of mankind.

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