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Response to 'Settler Colonialism as a Structure? Reflections on Settler Colonial Discourse'

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This welcome collection of essays extends the scope of current analyses of settler colonialism as a distinct mode of domination. It does so in multiple directions: it considers the ancient world, which has been largely neglected by settler colonial studies, it considers the question whether internal or domestic and external colonialisms may be seen as linked in aims and methods, it questions the wisdom of maintaining rigid binaries separating settler colonists and other collectives, it considers instances when establishing colonies of settlers was considered and then discarded, and it even considers whether current fantasies about space colonisation should be interpreted as contemporary manifestations of a long lasting tradition of settler colonial imaginings.

Jeremia Pelgrom's 'The Ancient Roots of Settler Colonialism' surveys the 'logic of elimination' in the ancient world. It begins with Machiavelli's insight regarding the distinction between ambition and necessity: "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 Gallic invaders of northern Italy eliminated the local inhabitants, Machiavelli argued, while the Roman Empire was often satisfied with exacting subjection and tribute. Pelgrom also remarks on another insight offered by Machiavelli when reflecting on the displacement of peoples: elimination can only happen if the invaders displace collectively and at once; if they do not, they would cooperate with the locals, becoming more aggressive if the conditions change at a later stage.

Pelgrom, with Machiavelli, finds that the logic of elimination is indeed applicable to ancient resettlements. This is a recent historiographical development, and, as Pelgrom notes, "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."

There is a political dimension to this logic. The examples of predominantly 'necessity-driven' colonisation in the ancient world Pelgrom appraises "highlight an emancipatory dimension": the colonists "set out with the promise of equality – receiving equal land allotments and political rights –

opportunities that were often unattainable in their homelands". Thus, a settler colonial moment is clearly detectable, a "shift toward colonial practices" that "can be roughly dated to the 6th and 2nd centuries BCE". This 'shift', like the global settler revolution of the nineteenth century, seminally identified by James Belich, had ideological dimensions (Belich 2009). Plato engaged with the politics of displacement that emerged from this transition, seeing "a mild form of civic purging", preferable to the "harsher alternative of execution": "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 (Plato, Laws 5.735c–d)."

And so did Isocrates, who warned Philip II "against the dangers posed by potentially unruly mobs, particularly discharged soldiers" and suggested "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" (Isocrates, *To Philip, 120–123*. In the Roman context, Pelgrom concludes, a similar pattern is recognisable, "where 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". Settler colonialism as a distinct mode of domination is thus observable in the politics of the ancient world, as well as in Machiavelli's reflection on these politics.

A distinct shift towards settler colonialism and its politics is also the topic of Jitse Daniels' intervention. In 'Caesar's World Turned Inside Out?' Daniels identifies a veritable Roman 'Settler Revolution'. During the first century BCE there was "an explosion of colonial foundations in the Roman provinces under Caesar and Augustus", whereas "Rome had been very reluctant for most of its Republican history to found *coloniae* outside of Italy". Prior to this 'revolution', Rome had organised the administration of provinces, displaying "effective methods for urbanising and controlling regions that were less disruptive to elite exploitation structures than founding large settler colonies". A *colonia* established in an already subjugated region would be disruptive, as the demands of settlers would inevitably clash with the local Roman elite's interests.

But disruption, Daniels argues, was precisely the point, it was disruption on the outside that created stability on the inside. Military, strategic, and demographic considerations were important, but Daniels links this 'settler revolution' with Caesar's political project and understands the foundation of Roman *coloniae* in the east, with reference to "their role in facilitating and stabilizing a regime change at the core of the empire". Caesar was crucially exporting internal contradictions: "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."

Dinah Wouters' 'Reason of State Literature in Dutch Colonial Practice' returns to early modern reflections on the distinction, in Machiavellian terms, between expansion driven by ambition and displacement forced by necessity. She unearths a letter by Pieter van Hoorn, a prominent colonist in Batavia and a member of the Council of the Indies between 1663 to 1677. While the Dutch Republic did not aim to establish settler communities overseas, preferring to protect the trade monopoly enjoyed by the Dutch East India Company (no Caesar was in charge in this instance), it did consider the question of a possible policy shift towards establishing colonies of settlers. In this debate, van Hoorn expressed a pro-settler discourse, which was minoritarian but not inconsequential.

In 1675 van Hoorn "argued for the relative independence of the colony of Batavia", that is, for establishing there a community of Dutch settlers independent of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Like Machiavelli, he grounded his advice on his grasp of the Roman colonial experience (and on a few prominent political thinkers of his time, including Carlo Sigonio and Francis Bacon). But there was to be no 'shift' or settler 'revolution' in this instance. The Spanish and Portuguese had promoted settler communities in their domains, which resulted in some significant advantages, but these experiments did not have to contend with a trading company's exclusive monopoly of *all* trade. For "settler communities to thrive overseas, the trade monopoly would have needed to be relaxed", Wouters concludes. It was a "highly profitable monopoly", and van Hoorn's advocacy of a reason of state fell on deaf ears. Perhaps there were relatively few contradictions to export; the reason of profit emerged triumphant over the reason of state.

In 'When Does a Settler Become an Ancient Settler?' Mark L. Thompson appraises the implications of distinguishing between 'old' settlers and 'new' settlers, as many of his sources did when facing a newly established political regime on lands that had witnessed prior waves of colonial immigration. Indeed, colonies rarely "originate at a single moment from a single transplanted national group and develop in a linear, organic fashion from that point", Thompson remarks, "even if 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." And yet, "many colonial societies had complex, plural origins in which categorizations of settler and native were not always so simple or so straightforward". How do unavoidable plural origins, and some of the settlers' claims based on prior dealings with native

authorities (and thus their challenge against the prerogatives of the newly installed colonial authorities), affect the 'structure' of settler colonialism?

Thompson considers early eighteenth century petitions addressing Pennsylvania's provincial assembly brought forward by settlers who "traced their ancestry back over half a century to the colony of New Sweden (1638-1655)". These settlers defined themselves as "ancient settler", or "ancient planter", a category that would recur time and again in US history (and indeed in most settler colonial histories). "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." Not only some settlers had arrived before other ones, but the former were also claiming rights based on their being "first purchasers" of native lands – it was a recognition of native title that undermined claims based on Royal grants.

Thompson observes an instance in which different sets of settlers and their claims are pitted against each other, not different *modes* of colonial practice, as Pelgrom, Daniels and Wouters do. The 'ancient settlers' were not 'Native', "but 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."

The 'ancient settlers' were being dispossessed. A settler colonial 'shift' in this instance is also a shift away from previous colonial traditions. It was a North American manifestation of Caesar's 'settler revolution'.

If the Dutch authorities were reluctant to establish settler communities elsewhere, perhaps it is because in many ways they were establishing them at home. In an essay entitled 'Plantations in the Peatlands?' Maarten Zwiers reconstructs two episodes of Dutch domestic colonialism. Was it settler colonialism? The answer is yes, Zwiers argues, as *terra nullius* was manufactured through 'swampification' (a concept originally proposed by geographer Morgan Vickers designating the "process whereby governments, corporations, and the press socially (re)invented swamplands as uninhabitable spaces of death and disease to justify their destruction"). Colonists were manufactured too, and the 'Colonies of Benevolence' Zwiers concentrates on were designed as "a dual cultivation effort", whereby 'useless' poor would be turned into virtuous citizens by making them turn "useless" swamps into productive fields".

The Colonies of Benevolence, a nineteenth century instance of domestic colonialism, relied on colonial traditions on the outside and on internal colonial traditions (Arniel 2017; Veracini 2021. This is a colonial endeavour that shaped my thinking about settler colonialism and its political traditions. In

2017-2018 I advised ICOMOS and UNESCO on the Kingdoms of the Netherlands and Belgium's application for recognition of the Colonies of Benevolence as a UNESCO world heritage site). Not far from their locations, the 'peat colonies' had transformed entire ecosystems over the *longue durée*. Labourers "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." Crucially, Zwiers detects the logic of elimination in operation. Even if "large-scale elimination of (specifically racialized) native populations did not occur within the Netherlands", he notes, a "multispecies perspective" highlights the persistence of "eliminatory practices". The external settler revolution did not occur in the Netherlands also because contradictions were being displaced internally and on the environment.

Like Thompson, Karène Sanchez Summerer, in her 'Contested "Modernities", Unaccepted Intermediaries?', aims to disrupt the categories of 'settler' and 'native'. Intermediaries were important to all colonial regimes and the Levant was no exception: "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', straddled multiple worlds, facilitating negotiations, adapting ideas, and often challenging rigid colonial binaries." The intermediaries were "merchants, translators, educators, and bureaucrats", and 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."

Sanchez Summerer rehearses the careers of Albert Abraham Antebi, a Jewish leader active in pre-Mandatory Palestine, and Palestinian "priest, educator and campaigner Niqula Khoury". Both contributed to "shaping alternative, locally grounded visions of modernity/ies that did not conform to either colonial or nationalist orthodoxies". Their "fluid loyalties" enable 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". Fair enough, an appraisal of fluidity seems necessary, but was not the settler colonial shift represented by the Zionist second Aliyah that reduced the very conditions of possibility for intermediation, flattening it underneath the binary logic of a settler colonial project?

Clemens Six's 'A Bright Future for Settler Colonialism?' concludes this edited collection. Fantasies around outer space have a history, a settler colonial history. Six argues that they actually prefigure a final consummation of settler colonialism, because they "promise absolute sovereignty", a

sovereignty that settler communities 'aimed for before but never achieved', and because "they envision the foundation of a new civilisation not only in cultural but also evolutionary terms". A new species! Settlers often think about renewed manhood, but this fantasy is literally about a new man in a new world.

While Six counters claims that "space settlement is not a form of settler colonialism because there are no indigenous communities in outer space to be massacred" by noting that they confuse "settler colonialism's means with its end", he also observes that "outer space manifests a *terra nullius* par excellence", enabling "a complete disentanglement from all earthly matters, including the existing legal, political, and economic relations", and creating "the opportunity for an altogether different civilisation released from the confines and flaws of what humans have created so far on Earth". No previously ensconced elites, no petitioning 'old settlers', no Indigenous peoples present in space, and no need for intermediaries; these settlers will "diverge from humanity and human history not only culturally but also evolutionarily".

In one respect, however, these settlers will remain like the settlers of old. They will be exporting political contradictions. Indeed, only the prospect of colonising outer space allows thinking about finally offsetting on the outside all contradictions. Capital accumulation, unleashed on a limitless outside can proceed forever, unchained, finally free from a finite Earth and from the contradictions that the operation of capitalism inevitably produces. Fantasies about colonising outer space are an insurance policy against political transformation. Plato would have approved, and so would have Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the nineteenth century serial promoter of British settler colonies and political economist, whose work crucially influenced Marx's critique (Piterberg & Veracini 2015). Fantasising about space colonies turns out to be a neo-Wakefieldean proposition: settler colonialism to save capitalism from itself. In the meantime, the fantasy of these settlements, like the actual *coloniae* that Rome established in the first century BCE, reinforce a specific political order at home. Settler colonialism is still Cesar's response.

This collection expands the limits of settler colonial studies, but the purpose is not to colonise the frontiers of this interpretative analytics – to establish an intellectual imperium. Not at all – the task is, it seems to me, to test a focus on structural domination and on a logic of elimination in the context of a productive debate where distinct methodologies combine and interact, and where different expertise's are deployed to test an interpretative lens' viability. We learn from a positive match, from negative results, and from observing only limited or partial applicability. And we refine our thinking on decolonisation as we proceed.

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