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Logics of Elimination and Settler Colonialism: Decolonization or National Liberation?

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ABSTRACT: *This article engages with Patrick Wolfe's theoretical underpinnings and programmatic consequences of his settler-colonial theory. It contextualizes the renaissance of the settler-colonial paradigm, scrutinizing its theoretical innovations. In doing so, the article traces Wolfe's work back to its origin in the work of Marcel Mauss and his notion of total social facts, discussing this theory's political orientation around anti-racism and liberal subjectivity. It then shows how Wolfe applies his theory to Palestine, erasing class divisions and imperialism, militating against the theory and practice of national liberation. In conclusion it reflects on the use and limits of this theory for supporting anti-systemic struggle.*

KEY WORDS: *Decolonization; Imperialism; Marcel Mauss; National liberation; Palestine; Patrick Wolfe; Settler colonialism*

In 1974, the Palestinian sociologist, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, published an edited volume titled *Settler Regimes in Africa and the Arab World*, which was the fruit of an earlier conference of the Association of Arab American University Graduates. Abu-Lughod wrote of the 'comparative analysis of national liberation movements and settler regimes in Africa and the Middle East'. Such regimes, including Algeria, Angola, Israel (Palestine), Mozambique, and South Africa embraced 'exclusivism, exploitation, oppression, and racism'.¹ The concept was used as a thread to weave solidarities among those fighting foreign domination involving territorial white/European settlement. The volume was not isolated. From countless articles in *Al-Hadaf*,² and Amílcar Cabral's interventions at the Tricontinental Conference, to writing in *The Journal of Palestine Studies* and *Middle East Report*, analyses of European settler-colonialism were widespread and grounded in a Marxist framework.³ These intellectual works marked their antagonist as imperialist capitalism and were aligned organically with, if not produced by, the national liberation movements.

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¹ Ibrahim. A. Abu-Lughod & Baha Abu-Laban (1974) *Settler Regimes in Africa and the Arab World: The Illusion of Endurance*. 4 (Wilmette, IL: Medina University Press International), pp. i–ii.

² This was the magazine of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

³ Amílcar Cabral (1979) *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings of Amílcar Cabral* (New York: Monthly Review Press); Patrick McMichael (2004) *Settlers and the Agrarian Question: Capitalism in Colonial Australia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).

Times have changed. In the third decade of the new millennium, settler-colonialism is on the tip of tongues across intellectual circles. Alongside the renewed popularity of settler-colonialism, a new field of settler-colonial studies has congealed.⁴ While this scholarly field is dynamic and to some extent ecumenical, it has been moored to two scholars: Lorenzo Veracini and Patrick Wolfe. It is generally distinct in its area of concern from Indigenous studies, although with some overlap, and conceptually distinct from the older work on settler colonialism.⁵

For that reason, we ought to take seriously its innovative aspects. At least six features are salient. Theoretically, Wolfe's work fuses an under-examined Maussian approach with Marxism. The approach situates settler-colonialism as one among many regimes of race. Such regimes, meant to interpret history, elevate the internal operational logic of the settler-colonial regime over the history the regime is meant to interpret, inconsistently locating causality within it, and bringing settler-colonialism close to an ideal type. Second, settler colonialism is marked by a 'logic of elimination', in place of older work focusing on land alienation alongside settler invasion. While this racist logic is linked to capitalism, it exceeds methodologically materialist explanation, locating causality primarily in settler will and white supremacist hatred. Third, the analysis generally relies on methodological nationalism, as given territorial nation-states, over time, become the space in which distinct regimes of race rule. Fourth, as a result, the insistence on comparable national units erases the broader history within which settler-colonial projects unfold, to which they contribute, and which must be identified to be overcome – 'if you do not *hit* it, it will not *fall*'.⁶ Imperialism, occasionally present as history, disappears as theory. Fifth, accompanying imperialism's disappearance is the disappearance of its countervailing force. Whereas settler-colonialism used to be a device to interpret the ebb and flow of colonial-capitalism and the struggle for national liberation, the latter is no longer present. The theory links an outcome of liberal multicultural subjectivity and absence of state discrimination and violence to subjective shifts within settler cognition.⁷ Sixth, the theory essentially erases class. Blindness to class and the theory of imperialism goes together with the focus on achieving full subjecthood within political democracy through elimination of racist political exclusion or subjection. Because theory informs practice, it is critical to understand and critique ideas that make anti-systemic claims while erasing the forces

⁴ Patrick Wolfe (1999) *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*. Writing past colonialism series (London, New York: Cassell); Patrick Wolf (? OK?) (2006) *Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native*, in *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8(4), pp. 387–409.; Lorenzo Veracini (2013) 'Settler Colonialism': Career of a Concept, in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41(2), pp. 313–333. I restrict my analysis to the far more influential writings of Wolfe.

⁵ Corey Snelgrove, Rita Dhamoon & Jeff Cornthassel (2014) Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3(2); Rana Barakat (2018) Writing/Righting Palestine Studies: Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Sovereignty and Resisting the Ghost (s) of History, in *Settler Colonial Studies* 8(3), pp. 349–363.

⁶ 'The Situation and Our Policy After the Victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan' (August 13, 1945) Mao Tse-Tung (1967) *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung: Vol. 4* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press), p. 19.

⁷ Cabral defines national liberation as "the inalienable right of every people to have their own history...regain[ing] this right usurped by imperialism...to free the process of development of the national productive forces...the principal aspect of national liberation is the struggle against...neocolonialism...national liberation necessarily corresponds to a revolution." *Unity and Struggle*, p. 130.

against which national liberation unfolded—not just colonialism, but also imperialism and capitalism. That is what this article attempts to do.

I present the argument in five main sections. The first section briefly situates the contemporary resurrection of settler-colonial analyses in Palestine studies and more broadly. It then analyzes Wolfe's theoretical map of settler-colonialism versus franchise colonialism. It proceeds to discuss the notion of a 'logic of elimination', and examines how Wolfe applies it to understanding Zionist colonization of mandate Palestine. It then analyzes these frameworks' political strategies and Wolfe's desired outcome, contrasting them to Palestinian revolutionary positions. In doing so, the article approaches Wolfe from a perspective linking theory and practice—in this case, intellectual production for national liberation.

The Contemporary Resurrection of Settler-Colonial Studies

Settler-colonialism's initial resuscitation in Palestine studies re-oriented knowledge production toward liberation politics. Those who did this work in the wake of the Second Intifada and the 2008-09 Gaza Strip massacre broke through the Zionist intellectual ghetto of 'ethnic conflicts', 'peace-building', and 'reconciliation'. In the words of the editors of the path-breaking issue on/in

Settler Colonial Studies,

*The central question for committed scholarship and liberatory movements should be how to develop a praxis that brings back decolonization and liberation as the imperative goal. The advantage of advancing settler colonialism as a relevant interpretative framework for the study of Zionism is not only that it can offer conceptual and political possibilities for how we read Palestine today, but that it also dismantles deep-seeded analyses and assumptions sustaining claims of exceptionalism. It brings Israel into comparison with cases such as South Africa, Rhodesia and French-Algeria.*⁸

Furthermore, this 'perspective offer[ed] the possibility of a new in-gathering of movements, Harnessing each other's strengths for an active, mutual, and principled Palestinian alignment with the Arab struggle for self-determination', an approach which asserts the Palestinian struggle only can be won when 'embedded within ... -broader struggles—all anti-imperial, all anti-racist'.⁹ Comparison identified Israel's similarities to other settler-colonies where national liberation struggles partially had succeeded, while nesting Palestine in a discussion of the Arab national question.

While the authors laudably urged the consolidation of intellectual support for Palestinian national liberation, this call was not borne out in much subsequent work, despite the explosion in the use of the phrases, if not the paradigm, as applied to Palestine.¹⁰ The use of settler-colonial theory, connected to a specific thinker, has been the basis of

⁸ Omar. J. Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie & Sobhi Samour. (2012) Past Is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine, *Settler Colonial Studies* 2(1), p. 4. See also the remainder of the special issue and the bibliography.

⁹ Salamanca, Qato, Rabie, and Samour, p. 5.

¹⁰ Google scholar search for "Palestine" and "settler-colonialism" between 2000 and 2011 produced 845 results, and 2012 to 2022, 7,750 results; "Palestine" and "settler colonial" in the same two periods gives 745 and 6,500 results; "Israel" and "settler colonial" produces 837 results and 7,030 results.

arguments about citational erasure, inattention to class factors, and contentions that much work on Palestine has not been tightly moored to such writings.¹¹ While these arguments are cogent, they have not taken the theoretical substance of the new subfield of settler-colonial studies seriously enough. Rather, we should take Wolfe seriously, because he wrote politically influential theory.

Settler Colonialism as Analytic: Historical Method

What was Wolfe's settler-colonialism? His earliest theoretical commitments, diluted in later statements, are partially materialist. He argued that all forms of colonial control were part of imperialist social relations, connected to capitalism, trusts, and monopolies.¹² His departure point was that colonialism was 'a system that appropriates and exploits land and labour' in varying historical patterns.¹³ Even in his last works, he wrote of 'imperialism's far-flung network of unequal social relations', from 'slavery' to 'indenture', or 'dispossession', on to 'compradorship', or '(inter)mediation', or 'commercial exchange', each birthing 'a corresponding racial category'.¹⁴ Furthermore, he described settler-colonialism in the Americas as marked by the shift from mercantilist 'trading at the borders', to 'the logic of production' penetrating into 'the heart of native societies', and later 'Red people's land producing the White man's property', a 'primitive accumulation'.¹⁵ These broadly resemble materialist modes of analysis, focused on accumulation and power linked to control of the means of production.

More specifically, Wolfe's materialism re-integrated the practice of settler-colonialism, and its colonial-racial ideologies, with the forms of resistance needed to break with it into post-colonial theory.¹⁶ From this entry point, his earliest and most consistent ambitions were to clarify that settler-colonialism was a specific mode of colonialism, a 'population-specific mode ... of colonial domination'—a corrective to post-colonial theory's dominant emphasis on colonies where labor-exploitation dominated.¹⁷ He therefore distinguished between labor-exploiting and labor-eliminating colonies, emphasizing the 'material conditions that historically shaped the different colonial relationships'.¹⁸ In 'franchise-colonial relationships', as in the colonies occupying South Asia and Indonesia, surplus value was extracted by 'mixing [the natives] labor with a colony's natural resources'. In contrast, settler colonies 'seek ... to replace the natives on their land', through wide-scale 'expropriation' and set that land to work 'by means of a subordinated labor force (slaves, indentures, convicts) whom they import from elsewhere'. As a result, 'settler colonialism introduced a zero-sum contest over land on

¹¹ Kareem Rabie (2019) "Palestinian Homes and Houses: Subjectivities and Materialities," presented at New Directions in Palestinian Studies 2019, Brown University; Brenna Bhandar & Rafeef Ziadah (2016) Acts and Omissions: Framing Settler Colonialism in Palestine Studies, *Jadaliyya*, available online at: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/32857>. [Accessed: March 9, 2022].

¹² Patrick Wolfe (1999) *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*. Writing past colonialism series (New York: Cassell), pp. 1, 41.

¹³ Patrick Wolfe (2016) *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso), p. 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 10.

¹⁶ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism*, p. 1.

¹⁷ Wolfe, *Traces of History*, p. 14.

¹⁸ Patrick Wolfe (1997) History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory, from Marx to Postcolonialism, *The American Historical Review* 102(2), p. 420.

which conflicting modes of production could not ultimately coexist'. The Indigenous 'mode of production' would cease to exist. Therefore, 'the primary logic of settler colonialism can be characterized as one of elimination'.¹⁹

Following this analytical trail, Wolfe had a clear conceptual nesting: capitalism was the overall process, linked to imperialism, which was then linked (it is implied) to national oppression, although rendered blurrily as national inequality. Within this conceptual-historical chain, there are numerous possible methods to extract value and maintain inequality. Furthermore, ideology and discourse were largely an effect of the specific social relations, including varied forms of colonialism, slavery, and labor-importation, which defined specific social formations.²⁰ Wolfe's analysis presented race as an effect of racial ideology, which was, in turn, an effect of inequality: 'colonised populations continue to be racialised in specific ways that mark out and reproduce the unequal relationships'.²¹

Before clarifying this analysis's content, let us consider how Wolfe tried to weld together this approach of population management, population-level domination and inequality, and Marxism. Methodologically, the entry point appears to be Marcel Mauss's notion of a 'total social fact', encompassing phenomena that draw into their gravity well analytically separate institutional and social structures.²² However, Mauss's conception was opaque and underdeveloped.²³ Wolfe seems to have followed the interpretation of such facts as *specific ontological entities*,²⁴ claiming Europeans rule through 'regimes of race' that become total social facts, and which 'coordinate ... and mobilise ... racial doctrine', amongst other resources: 'economic, political, moral, mythic, legal, institutional, sexual, and aesthetic'.²⁵ Thus, while Wolfe argues that race justifies social inequalities, and is deployed to 'order subject populations differentially in pursuit of particular historical agendas', other formulations work against this notion.²⁶ Wolfe used this concept to isolate settler-colonialism as a specific and nearly encompassing regime, which because of its allowance of other factors was plastic enough to allow for deploying materialism—yet only when necessary.

The concept of racial regimes slowly came to structure his analysis, turning race from effect to cause, while reworking concepts like imperialism into pre-accumulation, so they become adjutants to such regimes. The analysis slowly shifted to white power—not understood as linked to power over the means of production, but as a self-explaining ambition. As he stated, 'colonisers repetitively seek to impose and maintain White supremacy', and he wished to understand 'the foundations on which Europeans

¹⁹ Patrick Wolfe (2001) Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race, *The American Historical Review*, 106(3), p. 868. Note this means, against long-standing movement/analytical discourse, Rhodesia, South Africa, and Algeria would not be settler-colonies.

²⁰ As he writes, 'Such discursive distinctions, which survive the de-territorialization of imperialism, are clearly of considerable historical significance. They only make sense in relation to the material conditions that historically shaped the different colonial relationships concerned.' Wolfe, *History and Imperialism*, p. 420.

²¹ Wolfe, *Traces of History*.

²² Claude Levi-Strauss (2013) *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (London: Routledge), pp. 25–32.

²³ Alexander. Gofman (1998) A Vague but Suggestive Concept: The Total Social Fact, in Wendy James and N. J. Allen, *Marcel Mauss: A Centenary Tribute* (Oxford, NY: Bergahn Books), pp. 63–70.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁵ Wolfe, *Traces of History*, p. 18.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13. Also, it seems tautological to state that the particular historical agenda to which Wolfe was referring is white supremacy.

established white supremacy and the changing ways in which they have sought to maintain it'²⁷ – 'White people doing the ruling',²⁸ through the 'manage[ment] of subject populations'.²⁹ Why did they need to manage these populations? On the one hand, 'The common factor is Whiteness'.³⁰ On the other, as Wolfe wrote, drawing on Barbara Jeanne Fields, who sharply critiqued whiteness studies, 'colonizers—in this case, planters—did not set out to create racial discrimination. They set out to create wealth', quoting her statement that the 'object was to produce cotton or sugar or rice or tobacco, not to produce white supremacy'.³¹ While his wish to correct what he called 'Marxism's notorious color blindness', embedded in its 'economic thinking' was probably the source of this opacity, his deployment of contradictory analytical frameworks failed to bring the historical landscape into focus.³² Hence, while he often gestured to labor and exploitation, he did not focus on them and he ultimately surrendered to an anti-materialist understanding of power. Class and value were nearly absent from his analysis, with almost no attention to how they constituted hierarchy or made wealth or accumulation the motor behind settler-colonialism. Race, instead, was a golem, living a life of its own and needing to be killed on its own, once given life through the blessings of social power.

Essentially, the key antagonism in his work became politically-enshrined inequality between 'populations' or 'societies',³³ derived from his work on Australia as marked by 'the mutual separateness of the two principal parties to the Australian colonial process'.³⁴ Yet, such an account inevitably remains descriptive, creating false abstractions. Populations reduced to racial aggregates are 'abstraction[s] if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed', and 'these classes in turn are an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest, e.g. wage labour, capital, etc. These latter in turn presuppose exchange, division of labour, prices, etc'. Thus, 'to begin with the population ... would be a chaotic conception ... of the whole'.³⁵ Indeed, these patterns of production and power within racially-marked populations are constituent building blocks of accumulation on a world scale. His conception of domination takes the unequal power relationships between racially-marked populations as established facts rather than phenomena to be explained. However, races, populations, and societies do not find themselves hating one another. The will to white power can hardly account for British settler-colonialism in Ireland, for example, except by stating that the Irish were not white when colonized and became white later on. Such an explanation would be tautological, begging the causal question of how the British decided to colonize Ireland and how Ireland removed that oppression.³⁶ Furthermore, few racially-marked populations in recent times have been wholly eliminated in terms of demography. Rather, settler-colonialism invasions linked to accumulation on a

²⁷ Wolfe, *Land, Labor, and Difference*, p. 867.

²⁸ Patrick Wolfe (2016) *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso Books).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19; but see B. J. Fields (2001) Whiteness, Racism, and Identity, *International Labor and Working Class History*, pp. 48–56.

³¹ Wolfe, *Land, Labor, and Difference*, p. 867.

³² Wolfe, *History and Imperialism*, p. 407. This is, clearly, a strawman Marxism.

³³ "Settler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies." Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, p. 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.163.

³⁵ Karl Marx (1980) *Marx's Grundrisse* (Camden, UK: Macmillan), p. 34.

³⁶ Thanks to one of my reviewers for raising this point.

world scale have reconfigured such groups and their internal social relations, often savagely. Yet, Wolfe's approach erases contradictions—gender, class, caste—internal to those populations. All of these, nevertheless, were necessary moves to create an ontology based on self-activating racial oppression: the racial conflict thesis.

It is worthwhile to contrast this analysis with Fanon, the classic reference point and important lodestar for the Palestinian revolution. He argued that in a colony, race and class, superstructure and structure, collapsed into one another. However, he fused that analysis with his explosive condemnation of the post-colonial national bourgeoisie and neo-colonialism – which he nowhere advocated, even as an intermediary solution. He wanted the redistribution of wealth and did not spare neo-colonialism from his polemic.³⁷ In contrast, amidst Wolfe's conceptual shift from race as emerging to maintain wide-scale inequality to deploying a 'regime of race' to make sense of a self-activated white rule, imperialism gradually disappears from his analysis (class was never very present). In turn, the analytical clarity and logical nesting of concepts clouds over. Settler-colonialism slides into a portable category shorn of its moorings to historical accumulation, and it becomes one amongst many regimes, specifically marked by the logic of elimination. The lack of serious attention to imperialism, its periodization, diverse political histories over space and time, and its relationship to accumulation on a world scale confuses rather than clarifies the issues that settler-colonialism tries to investigate.

Wolfe's emphasis on outcome, understood as a violent process of displacement from land, became a hinge upon which the door to settler-colonialism as a universal category opened up. Although his methodological notes, at times, insisted on settler-colonialism as one amongst a variety of political processes that constituted the history of imperialism, and thus laying the groundwork for a national liberation struggle, he later moved to advocate the universalization of his conception to all global instances where he suggested the logic was in play. From sub-category, settler-colonialism became master category on a global scale:

*The logic of elimination is prior to features that distinguish settler societies among themselves, such as whether they are monarchical or republican, Christian or Jewish, Black or White, communist or democratic, Asian or European.*³⁸

While Wolfe did not elaborate on how Asia or China were settler-colonial,³⁹ he nonetheless presented settler-colonialism as a universal notion: 'I would like a general account of settler-colonialism to be able to include such relationships as those between Chinese and Tibetans, Tswana and Khoi-San, Russians and Chechens, or

³⁷ Franz Fanon (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated from French by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press), pp. 5, 98. Fanon's work most closely tracks the Tunisian experience, where he was living. Thus it was an after-the-fact critique of neocolonial models of capitalist power. Equally importantly, although Fanon was a critical theorist for the Palestinian revolution, he was sharply critiqued in the context of East African neo-colonialism. Thanks to Zeyad el Nabolsy for this point concerning Fanon's African reception, and to the reviewer for pushing me on Fanon in the Palestinian context.

³⁸ Patrick Wolfe (2012) *Purchase by Other Means: The Palestine Nakba and Zionism's Conquest of Economics*, *Settler Colonial Studies* 2(1), p. 135.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

Indonesians and Papuans'.⁴⁰ The question is not whether one meaningfully can construct a category of settler-colonialism that applies to Tibet (Wolfe in fact does not provide any accounts of how Russia or the Soviet Union, or Maoist China, were settler-colonial entities, but simply asserts it to be the case). While it is possible to place brackets around portions of any social process and create an abstraction, what remains unclear is the abstraction's utility and the theory-praxis relationship that Wolfe raised explicitly. Hence, one cannot simultaneously and with logical consistency claim that settler-colonialism and its logic of elimination are linked to the primal will to expansion glossed as capitalism, as Wolfe does, and that 'The logic of elimination is prior to features that distinguish settler societies among themselves, such as whether they are ... communist or democratic'.⁴¹ Given that Wolfe justifies this assertion through the centrality of the logic of elimination, we now examine how he understands that logic.

Logics of Elimination: Settler Colonies versus Franchise Colonies

Elimination is at the core of the theory of settler-colonialism. So, what does it mean? To which processes does it refer? In the broadest sense, elimination is linked to the 'settler-colonial will', glossed as 'a historical force that ultimately derives from the primal drive to expansion that is generally glossed as capitalism'.⁴² However, while that statement links elimination to capitalism, the phrase does not provide a clear theoretical or conceptual lens to interpret history. More clearly, Wolfe links the logic of elimination to a series of abstractions to be erased or processes to be displaced and replaced: Modes of production, labor-reliance, land, and peoplehood. However, in so doing, the use and meaning of these concepts diverge from their usual denotations, becoming inconsistent, or delinked from the historical sequences under scrutiny. We consider them in sequence.

First, one needs to consider his point about zero-sum contests between rival modes of production. Wolfe states that settler agriculture generally displaced non-settler agriculture, 'a primitive accumulation that turns native flora and fauna into a dwindling resource and curtails the reproduction of Indigenous modes of production'.⁴³ While this is accurate, the destruction of rival modes of production is not specific to settler-colonialism as per his definition: colonies where the original inhabitants do not provide labor. Indeed, such contests have emerged across history, including where substantial numbers of human beings endured long after the white settlers established new property relations. For example, settler-colonization leveled pre-colonial modes of production across Africa, alongside mass killing in Algeria and Namibia. In Palestine, by the time of the primitive accumulation of Al-Nakba, capitalism had thoroughly penetrated agrarian relations.⁴⁴ Franchise-settler colonies and capitalism on the whole destroyed

⁴⁰ Patrick Wolfe (2007) Palestine, Project Europe and the (Un-) Making of the New Jew: In Memory of Edward W. Said, *Edward Said: The Legacy of a Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press) p. 314.

⁴¹ Wolfe, *Purchase by Other Means*, p. 135.

⁴² Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, p. 167.

⁴³ Wolfe, *Traces of History*, p. 144.

⁴⁴ Riyadh Mousa (2006) *The Dispossession of the Peasantry: Colonial Policies, Settler Capitalism, and Rural Change in Palestine, 1918–1948* (PhD Dissertation, University of Utah).

rival modes of production without resort to genocide, while mixing the labor of colonized people with conquered land. Wolfe does not see this because his methodology only focuses on nearly- absolute demographic destruction. As a result, he comes close to denying a priori the applicability of materialist analysis to colonized peoples, including internal class differentiation before and after settler-colonial invasion and displacement – that is, the constitution of new modes of production after the capitalist-colonial invasion.⁴⁵ Notably, he avoids engagement with the many materialist approaches that have dealt with frontier expansion or shifts in the organization of land tenure and labor, whether these implied subsumption, primitive accumulation, or both, in contextually-specific sequences.⁴⁶

Second, Wolfe argued that, while settler-colonialism implies elimination of the native population, it also is marked by lack of reliance on native labor. As he writes, ‘When colonists first arrive, they generally try to persuade the Natives to work for them’. Why do they stop? ‘This option is typically abandoned before very long. In principle, it is not good policy to incur reliance on a population that one is simultaneously seeking to eliminate, nor to promote the survival of the bearers of sovereignties that exceed the settler import’.⁴⁷ If the settler mode is framed this way, South Africa, Zimbabwe, or implicitly Tunisia and Algeria were merely ‘*so-called* colonial settler societies’ (my italics) since they depended on indigenous labor. Yet, it also seems tautological: if settler-colonialism is marked by a logic of elimination, settler-colonies choose to focus on eliminating colonized subjects, rather than exploiting them. However, this is a re-description rather than an explanation. Wolfe’s emphasis on reliance or non-reliance on Indigenous labor is quite critical from a strategic perspective, clarifying the role of withholding labor in a national liberation strategy. However, creating a hard separation between settler-colonies and non-settler colonies based on the variable of labor reliance is not clarifying. There are four reasons for this. First, as Wolfe knew, labor reliance is not a binary but a spectrum variable (his silence on neighboring New Zealand, with 15 percent of its population Māori, is an indicator that he did not engage cases that contradicted his theory). Second, labor reliance waxes and wanes: As he wrote in his much more careful work on Australia, ‘settler-colonization relied upon Indigenous labour at every stage and in every site of its development;’ however, ‘exploitation of native labour was subordinate to the primary project of territorial acquisition’.⁴⁸ Third, there are many causes for colonies’ degree of labor reliance: intensity of population inflows, the degree and timing of decimation of the native population, and the need to suppress anti-colonial labor action, particularly as part of colonial learning. Some emanate from social stresses internal to capitalist metropolises, most especially Europe’s need to export a surplus population that it could not incorporate effectively within domestic social relations.⁴⁹ The logic of elimination

⁴⁵ Patrick Wolfe (2013) *Recuperating Binarism: A Heretical Introduction*, *Settler Colonial Studies* (London: Taylor & Francis), p. 257.

⁴⁶ Wilma. A. Dunaway (1996) *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700–1860* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ of North Carolina Press), pp. 18–19; Alexander Schölch (1982) *European Penetration and the Economic Development of Palestine, 1856–82*, *Studies in the Economic and Social History of Palestine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, pp. 10–87 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.)

⁴⁷ Wolfe, *Traces of History*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, p. 29.

⁴⁹ Utsa Patnaik & Prabhat Patnaik (2021) *Capital and Imperialism: Theory, History, and the Present* (New York: Monthly Review Press), pp. 115, 123.

does not offer an explanation for these processes, which it necessarily presents, but also brackets, as the outcome of anterior struggles and pressures, exterior to the 'regime'. This third problem interlaces with the second. If there is another source of labor that must be attracted to a settler-colony, it would follow that settler-colonies have a structural tendency to provide for those settlers, especially through land alienation and state consolidation, to provide wages equivalent to those available in the place from which they departed.⁵⁰ Four, from the perspective of contemporary anti-colonial resistance/national liberation, many peoples currently suffering under settler-colonialism are part of the reserve army of labor or directly exploited by capital, which necessarily shapes how they orient to a politics of decolonization or national liberation.

Wolfe's third argument, then, was that the logic of elimination concerns control of land: 'the primary motive for elimination is not race...but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element'. Settler-colonial societies come to create 'new colonial societ[ies] on the expropriated land base'.⁵¹ As he wrote, 'Settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal'.⁵² Yet, such statements are contradictory, for they do not clarify what must be eliminated, since eliminating the mode of production was not sufficient and killing off the population was not necessary. And insofar as land is the primary motivation and access to territory is the key unavoidable element for settler-colonialism, then labor-reliance could not be the main point, and Algeria and South Africa ought to have fallen under the category of settler-colonies. Furthermore, if the primary motive is access to territory, how can the primary motivation also be 'whiteness' or 'white supremacy'?

Ultimately, this analysis of the logic of elimination brings us to peoplehood. For Wolfe, methods of containment concerned the repressive incorporation of Indigenous human beings into Euroamerican society, 'whose common intention was the destruction of heterodox forms of Indian grouphood'.⁵³ Or, as he observes elsewhere, settler societies require the 'social death of Nativeness'.⁵⁴ Yet this inaccurately describes the modern-day United States, as Andrew Curley writes, where

*...domination is focused on state repression with occasional mention of the economic forces driving it. It fails to account for alternative colonial arrangements that might find it useful to keep Natives on the land with limited forms of authority, such as the authority to sign mineral leases and (not) regulate their environments.*⁵⁵

Likewise, in Palestine, from the Village Leagues of the 1970s to the Palestinian Authority in the present period, the main issue entailed preventing the consolidation of a political force that could contest Israeli seizure of the productive forces: the land, while allowing for the creation of forms of peoplehood, or the political organization of

⁵⁰ Zachary Lockman (2012) Land, Labor and the Logic of Zionism: A Critical Engagement with Gershon Shafir, *Settler Colonial Studies*, 2(1), pp. 9–38.

⁵¹ Wolfe, Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native, p. 388.

⁵² Ibid, p. 387.

⁵³ Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," p. 400.

⁵⁴ Patrick Wolfe (2013) Recuperating Binarianism: A Heretical Introduction, *Settler Colonial Studies*, p. 258.

⁵⁵ Andrew Curley (2021) Dependency Theory and Indigenous Politics, in: S. Farris et al. (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Marxism*, pp. 1150–1166 (Newbury Park, California: SAGE Publications), p. 1162.

‘populations’, which do not represent a threat to settler-capitalist property relations—i.e. comprador-ism.⁵⁶ Consolidated settler-colonial states take actions to protect domestic property relations as well as the overarching juridical and political framework under which capitalist property rights are allocated. Insofar as those lands’ previous occupants maintain any kind of political ambition to reverse or transcend those land thefts, they will face continued attempts at disorganization of their capacity to constitute political formations. This can work through preservation of non-threatening forms of group identity. Settler-colonies routinely preserve forms of ‘grouphood’ that work in their interests, and such forms are marked by class relationships internal to the colonized population. In this way, the logic of elimination appears as an overly-clouded and inconsistent concept that fails to refer to control over land and class, and thereby obscures central elements of settler-colonial history, including imperialism.

To be sure, no scholar could erase entirely the linkage between the capitalist world system and settler-colonialism: ‘Behind it... lay the driving engine of international market forces’ with their ‘imperative for expansion’.⁵⁷ Yet within this way of thinking, at least three problems arise. First, international market forces are not legible processes. The market predated capitalism.⁵⁸ Invoking such forces tells us nothing about the political history of capitalism, including settler-colonialism. Second, capitalism reshaped relations and forces of production in Palestine and the United States long before the process took on the character of massive and systematic land alienation. And, in doing so, imperialism played a major role. Third, Western settler-colonialism and capitalism involve processes beyond ‘international market forces’, including population export to resolve European social contradictions, war-making, primitive accumulation of land, uneven exchange, and a myriad of other historical processes—i.e. the military-political regulation and engineering of world-wide accumulation, including protecting logistics and trade routes; and short- and long-run investments interact to forge any particular settler-colonial invasion. In the Palestinian case, the Jewish Agency and other settler-capitalist institutions helped coordinate these flows and forces, eventually entering conflict with the Mandate, but this argument differs from endowing settler-colonialism with independent power from the outset.

In conclusion, the logic of elimination effectively organizes our understanding of the political history and social processes of settler-colonialism around a difficult-to-sustain distinction between labor-reliant franchise colonies and labor-excluding settler-colonies. One methodological problem lies in differentiating between types rendered as logical categories, rather than understanding the causal motors and biggest social and political forces that are the origins of flows of capital, settlers, and weapons. By forcing the social formations that are the outcomes of those flows into rigid categories, Wolfe does not accommodate history.⁵⁹ The focus on the logic of elimination forces him to argue that

⁵⁶ Wolfe knew this concept well. See *Traces*, p. 12.

⁵⁷ Wolfe, pp. 394–395; he elsewhere writes of mapping “the particular histories that sustain settler colonialism in any given locale,” taking the ideal-typical phenomenon of settler-colonialism as a force in and of itself: Patrick Wolfe (2012) *Purchase by Other Means: The Palestine Nakba and Zionism’s Conquest of Economics*, *Settler Colonial Studies* 2(1), p. 135.

⁵⁸ Janet. L. Abu-Lughod (1991) *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.d. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

⁵⁹ David Waldner (2002) From Intra-Type Variations to the Origins of Types: Recovering the Macro-Analytics of State Building, *Conference on Asian Political Economy in an Era of Globalization*, Dartmouth College, May, pp. 10–11. Available online at: <http://www.people.virginia.edu/~daw4h/Macroanalytics-of-State-Building.pdf>, accessed February 22, 2013.

colonies are established to extract or displace labor, rather than the classical and more correct understanding that differentiates between colonies of conquest and colonies of settlement, which included labor-exploiting settler colonies. Another major consequence is that his analysis loses connection with accumulation on a world scale and the role of imperialism. Since Palestine offers a powerful case for the centrality of imperialism, it is important to consider Wolfe's extensive writings on the country.

Palestine and Accumulation by Other Means

The most concise statement of Wolfe's analysis of Palestine can be found in 'Purchase by Other Means: The Palestine *Nakba* and Zionism's Conquest of Economics'.⁶⁰ Wolfe's narrative, especially his attention to land tenure, is often careful and sometimes correct, tracing the role of Zionist land purchases and the complicated role of Zionist capital inflows. Throughout, he notes the role of British power in supporting the Zionists. His major theoretical claims and innovations, however, reflect his problematic and inconsistent general framework. First, that Zionism was based on an inflow of capital which did not require a profit—an economistic approach. Second, that inflow is best described as part of Western pre-accumulation, rather than imperialism. Third, Zionist policy was 'an intensification' of settler-colonialism, a more 'exclusive exercise of the settler logic of elimination', re-deploying the logic of elimination. Fourth, social contradictions amongst Palestinians are a priori irrelevant or brushed under the table, sidestepping how those contradictions could affect the struggle for national liberation. He nests these points into a mix of theory and interpretive narrative of the Zionist invasion of mandatory Palestine. This section reads this account against Wolfe's ambition: to write 'histories that tell us enough about imperialism to suggest ways of resisting it'.⁶¹

According to his reading, Zionism was based on non-profit-seeking capital, allowing for the 'confounding of capitalist rationality'.⁶² Wolfe borrowed from the work of Gershon Shafir, who showed how Zionist historiography's idealism focused on the ideas of socialism imported in the Second Aliya did not define the Zionist project. This framing raises several issues. First, both Shafir and Wolfe accepted the stories Zionism told about itself, in particular the non-short-term- profit-seeking nature of Zionist capital inflows. According to Zionist propaganda, it is obvious that such capital flows were munificent contributions to a socialist project. According to Wolfe, such flows were the lifeblood of the total social fact of racial elimination. However, by 1948, the privately-owned sector was 60 percent of the Israeli economy.⁶³ Citriculture was central: Investments flowed in for land purchase, primarily through the private sector, which owned most of the Zionist land until WWII, and became the Mandate's major export sector, and even dominated the Jewish-Zionist sector of production.⁶⁴ This does not obviate the multifaceted role of Jewish capital in proto-state formation, or the use of settler-colonialism as a heuristic to read those processes.

⁶⁰ Wolfe, "Purchase by Other Means," p. 2012.

⁶¹ Wolfe, *History and Imperialism*, p. 420.

⁶² Wolfe, *Purchase by Other Means*, p. 140.

⁶³ Amir Locker-Biletzki (2018) Rethinking Settler Colonialism: A Marxist Critique of Gershon Shafir, *Rethinking Marxism* 30(3), pp. 441–461.

⁶⁴ Nahum Karlinsky (2000) California Dreaming: Adapting the 'California Model' to the Jewish Citrus Industry in Palestine, 1917–1939, *Israel Studies* 5(1), pp. 24–40.

However, it does show that Wolfe's theory lacks evidence. Furthermore, the category of 'non-profit seeking capital' sidesteps that capital, in general, is not merely about investment toward an anticipated short run return, but also is a relationship that is subordinate to the overall project of accumulation on a world scale. This cannot reduce to truck and barter on the market for profit, and Palestine is not exceptional in this respect.⁶⁵ Accumulation is a global process that settler-colonialism helps compose.⁶⁶ Capitalism's global expansion was inseparable from settler-colonialism and imperial predation, as much a part of 'capitalist rationality' as monopoly price-setting or Treasury bonds. Zionist capital imports also funded British imperial infrastructure build-up, and thereby defended accumulation on a world scale. Indeed, this was the mandate of the colony from the perspective of Zionist ideologues. In the words of one of Zionism's major thinkers, Theodor Herzl, 'We should there form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism'.⁶⁷ Put differently, Zionism served imperialists as they understood their goals as much as imperialism served Zionism, at least until British imperial planners began to see things differently.⁶⁸ The supposed non-profitability of Zionist capital imports only confounds capitalist rationality from a shoddy accountants' perspective. Capitalism is not reducible to mathematical equations but is a history of world-scale accumulation, a process that protects the social and political context for accumulation, thus foreclosing or suppressing alternative forms of organization.

This departure point then lead us to different questions: What kind of 'diaspora' Jews had money to send other Jews to Palestine? The answer is the middle-class and those richer: those interested in 'resolving' the Jewish Question in Europe and to a lesser extent in the US not through anti-Zionist internationalist revolution, but through settler-colonial capitalist state-building. Wolfe's economistic notion of capitalism would claim that those funding contemporary non-profits through massive foundations, or the middle class's smaller donations, contravene rather than crystallize capitalist rationality, here restricted to the quarterly returns of corporations.⁶⁹

Having reframed these questions, we can identify a convergence of capitalist interests in investing or exporting capital to Palestine: One, direct short-run monetary profit. Two, disassociating Jewishness from the radicalism or Communism of the poor in the eyes of the European ruling class. Three, the desire to tighten an imperialist-capitalist class alliance between Jewish Euro-American capital, and the European (later, the US) ruling classes. The law of value remained the over-arching relationship within which Zionism unspooled across historical Palestine.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Ali Kadri (2019) *Imperialism with Reference to Syria* (Singapore: Springer), pp. 30–31, 100–101.

⁶⁶ Amiya Kumar Bagchi (2008) *Perilous Passage: Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Capital* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers); Patnaik & Patnaik, *Capital and Imperialism*.

⁶⁷ Theodor Herzl (2012) *The Jewish State* (North Chelmsford, Massachusetts: Courier Corporation).

⁶⁸ Michael. J. Cohen (2011) Zionism and British Imperialism II: Imperial Financing in Palestine, *Journal of Israeli History* 30(2), pp. 115–139; and Danny Gutwein (2016) The Politics of the Balfour Declaration: Nationalism, Imperialism and the Limits of Zionist-British Cooperation, *Journal of Israeli History* 35(2), pp. 117–152.

⁶⁹ I. W. of C. A. Violence (2017) *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, Reprint edition, Reprint edition (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books); International Jewish anti-Zionist Network (2015) The Business of Backlash: <http://www.ijan.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/IJAN-Business-of-Backlash-full-report-web.pdf>.

⁷⁰ On the methodological point, see Ali Kadri (2020) *A Theory of Forced Labour Migration: The Proletarianisation of the West Bank Under Occupation (1967–1992)* (Singapore:Springer Nature).

Now, consider how Wolfe used the concept of pre-accumulation to help interpret the colonial assault against historical Palestine. Whereas in his earlier work, he uses settler- colonialism to describe a set of historical processes within imperialism, in his later work, imperialism disappears as a meaningful analytical category, with pre-accumulation basically taking its place. The concept is a logical abstraction derived from his account of Australian history, bridging the social formations of European industrial capital and the nascent settler social formations that settlers sought to create in Australia or Palestine. Wolfe defines pre-accumulation as the collected powers of a given society, which come into play when they encounter an Indigenous social formation with its own weaker form of pre-accumulation. This is a 'kind of historical capital... a range of economic, technological, military, cultural, and moral attributes that combine centuries of Eurocolonial history', where settlers possess: 'an effectively unlimited capacity to reproduce itself', a 'near inexhaustibility... there were always more settlers where the first ones had come from'. As native societies were ripped apart and demographically reduced, there would be more settlers to arrive to replace them.⁷¹

Indeed, pre-accumulation refers to important empirical phenomena which occurred during the colonization of Palestine, which rested on European capital and violence. As Wolfe narrates the process, the early colonial settlements benefited from a convergence of interests between local Zionists and the British government. The former needed an 'imperial protector'. The latter needed a 'reliable regional ally' to safeguard the passage to its highly lucrative imperial domains in South Asia.⁷² Lubricated by British imperialism, immigrant-settlers and capital flowed in. The 'growth of the Jewish sector' took place 'at the expense of the Indigenous sector'. Ongoing expansion, linked to the construction industry in Tel Aviv, allowed for the growth of the Jewish economy while placing the 'predominantly agrarian Native economy' under strain, producing a 'sub-proletarianised class of dispossessed Natives' – one of the few mentions of class amongst Palestinians.⁷³ Wolfe shows how this process interacted with the need to bring in actual Jews to consolidate the colonial enclave. While initially the Second Aliya tried to live at the subsistence level of surrounding Palestinian peasants, this attempt buckled. The response was the Conquest of Labor: 'the provision and maintenance of a closed, protected and autonomously reproduced circuit of production, consumption and exchange'. The World Zionist Organization through the Jewish National Fund backed this scheme, an inflow of capital that Wolfe describes as a 'creative subversion of market principles'. Wolfe's characterization of using these inflows to purchase contiguous land is unobjectionable.⁷⁴

However, pre-accumulation suffers from empirical and theoretical problems. First, this account hides that in Palestine, the human source material for Zionist settlement has been limited, the source of no small worry for Zionist politicians. Meanwhile, on the flipside, any notion of the 'relative fixity of the Native stock', whether human or material, only remotely approaches accuracy when one considers Palestine outside of its Arab strategic depth, a position which runs against the grain of nearly every anti-systemic force in the history of the Arab region from 1948 onwards. The relationship

⁷¹ Wolfe, *Traces of History*, p. 20.

⁷² Wolfe, *Purchase by Other Means*, p. 143.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 147–148.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 151–154.

of Palestine to the Arab national question has been a central element of Palestinian revolutionary thought, which linked liberating Palestine to liberating the Arab region from imperialism.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, on the level of theory, pre-accumulation offers an alternative to a theorization of colonization in Palestine as connected to accumulation based on relentless surplus-value extraction and historical value extraction, tied to franchise-colonialism in India, settler-Colonialism in the Americas, and the rule of monopoly capital: historical imperialism. By replacing imperialism with pre-accumulation, Wolfe quarantines the political dynamics of Israeli settler-colonialism within the spatial box of historical Palestine through methodological nationalism, erases periodization integral to previous theories of accumulation, creates the 'regime' of settler-colonialism as a master concept, and analytically severs anti-Zionism from other anti-imperialist struggles.⁷⁶ Such a concept turns settler-colonialism into a dark fate, in part by erasing the political forces—including but not reducible to the Arab peoples—necessary to resist it.

For Wolfe, Palestine was a unique example of the logic of elimination, yet the rigidity of his categories did not help to understand why. For instance, the Mandate-era Zionist decision to opt for non-reliance on native labor related to the need to attract a Jewish population inflow, and behind it, the capital inflows and imperialist political forces that wished for such an inflow. These forces were less-than-focused on elimination for the sake of elimination.⁷⁷ The 1967–1993 period shows how primitive accumulation of land has been more central than reducing labor reliance. Furthermore, the post-1993 de-emphasis on Palestinian labor, especially from the Gaza Strip, was a reaction to the intifada and conditioned by Israeli capacity to deal with that resistance through closure. This, in turn, was linked to wider geopolitical processes, including the collapse of the USSR, the US assault on Iraq, and the accompanying advance of US power.⁷⁸ Restricting causal analysis to the territorial box and abstract logics of elimination blinds us to central historical determinations, especially those tied to broader patterns of imperial power.

So how does Wolfe create Zionism as a more exclusive exercise in elimination? In essence, he does so through idealism: he bases his arguments on what Zionists have discussed doing rather than what Zionists have done. In fact, such idealism recurrently pocks his analysis. For example, when he argues that investments in Palestine went against the grain of capitalist 'rationality', he implicitly is rejecting an alternative hypothesis: theories of imperialism and accumulation on a world scale suffice to explain colonization in Palestine. Furthermore, he is contending that we ought to take the words of Zionist ideologues as facts.⁷⁹ In opting for an idealist rather than materialist understanding of elimination, he partially violates his own definitions, since

⁷⁵ PFLP (1969) Strategy for the Liberation of Palestine, *Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine*. Available online at: <http://pflp.ps/english/strategy-for-the-liberation-of-palestine/>, accessed December 27, 2018.

⁷⁶ Wolfe, *Traces of History*, p. 21.

⁷⁷ Lockman, Land, Labor and the Logic of Zionism; Gershon Shafir (1989) *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914* (Berkeley, University of California Press).

⁷⁸ Leila Farsakh (2002) Palestinian Labor Flows to the Israeli Economy: A Finished Story?, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 32(1), p. 21.

⁷⁹ Nahla Abdo (1992) Racism, Zionism and the Palestinian Working Class, 1920–1947, in *Studies in Political Economy*, p. 37; Larry Lockwood (1971) *Imperialism and the Israeli Economy* (Buffalo, NY: Middle East Research Center); P. A. Smith (1984) *Palestine and the Palestinians 1876–1983* (New York: St. Martin's Press); Sarah Graham-Brown (1982) The Political Economy of the Jabal Nablus, 1920–48, *Studies in the Economic and Social History of Palestine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, pp. 88–176 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press); Talal Asad (1976) Class Transformation under the Mandate, *MERIP Reports*, (53), pp. 3–23.

elimination no longer is what he has defined it as: the destruction of a mode of production, the physical destruction of a population, or land takeovers. It becomes coterminous with some Zionist ideologies. Such idealism erases the geography of Palestinian populations and their enduring relationship to the land. When fused with a purely binary conception of colonizer-colonized, it erases any mapping of how people are eliminated and how primitive accumulation occurs.⁸⁰ Yet, it matters if people are killed or displaced, and to where they are displaced. Indeed, flowing from the regional power relations, the Arab strategic depth, that prevented Palestinians from being cleansed from the land in greater numbers, Palestinians are more qualitatively sovereign than any US-based Indigenous people. Unlike any Indigenous forces in the current settler-states, Palestinians from Hamas to the PFLP to Islamic Jihad are using land from which they forced settlers, as the physical land-base for an armed nationalist struggle.⁸¹ Wolfe's a priori decisions about what Zionism is become a Procrustean bed preventing us from having an accurate map of Palestinian dispossession. That is, in shifting the terms of how to understand elimination, he obscures the actually-existing topography of Palestinian resistance, against his own normative aspirations.

Furthermore, Wolfe fails to pay enough attention to internal Arab/Palestinian social fractures and their political expressions, justifying it through 'binarism' ('I have regularly been accused of binarism – though not once by a Native').⁸² Wolfe's method disappears class within the history of Palestine through the notion of 'nativeness'. Yet 'Native peoples' do not speak with one voice, nor are they inserted one way into settler-colonialism. The class character of national liberation movements or their antagonists or half-hearted supporters are absent. We do not learn of the Qassamites, 'recruited by al-Qassam from among the landless peasants in the Jenin area and from the destitute labourers of the shanties on the outskirts of Haifa... [whose] class character... put them clearly beyond the reach of the factional system'.⁸³ Class and the geography of displacement are linked. Those who are removed from the land and become resident in refugee camps, on the one hand, and exile capital, on the other, can and did play powerful if distinct and eventually opposing roles in Palestinian nationalism. They have activated national and pan-Arab anti-Zionist sentiment or have channeled local and international sentiment and support into the 'statehood project', while maintaining different and shifting strategic orientations to surrounding Arab working-class populations. These ideological fractures partially occur along the lines of relationship to the means of production, or access to wages via geopolitical rent, mediated through any number of institutions. Class conflicts riddle populations. Some are keen to preserve the occupation/colonialism, while others will challenge it in different ways and with various intensities.⁸⁴ For some, 'elimination' means enrichment through settler-capitalist domination and its stabilization of neo-colonial domination in the West Bank and the tendrils of

⁸⁰ Such "normalization" or comprador elements are likewise active in the Indigenous populations of the United States.

⁸¹ At the time of writing this was a Gaza Strip-based phenomenon.

⁸² Wolfe, *Recuperating Binarism*, p. 257.

⁸³ Salim. Tamari (1982) *Factionalism and Class Formation in Recent Palestinian History*, in: R. Owen (ed.) *Studies in the Economic and Social History of Palestine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.*, pp. 177–202 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press), p. 195.

⁸⁴ Kareem Rabie (2021) *Palestine Is Throwing a Party and the Whole World Is Invited: Capital and State Building in the West Bank* (Durham: Duke University Press).

finance linking that to Gulf capitalist class formation, while for some, displacement has meant immiseration in the Gaza Strip.⁸⁵ Erasing class and political program through binarism implicitly places Islamic Jihad on the same plane as contemporary Palestinian-American normalizers. Wolfe's abstract logic runs aground on the shoals of history.

Furthermore, at any given moment, class provides a necessary entry point for disruption of production and affects who participates and how in anti-colonial political struggle, including determining whether it becomes a national liberation struggle. Erasure of class conduces to erasure of the role of labor exploitation or super-exploitation in accumulating colonial surplus value directly through production.⁸⁶ It erases how different classes might have different interests in pushing forward the actual physical process of resistance. Finally, it contributes to a class-blind notion of decolonization, indifferent to national liberation. In these ways, the theory draws a map of the history of settler-colonialism inadequate for the actually-existing struggle to liberate Palestine.⁸⁷

Political Goals, Methodology and Program

So, to what end did Wolfe write, to what ends can his writing be put, and how well does it serve to reach those ends? For Wolfe, settler-colonization was a conflict between populations 'with a will to colonise and those with a will to be free'.⁸⁸ Yet, characterizing Palestinians or any other racially-defined groups as having 'a will to be free' cannot help us understand history, for a 'will to be free' is so general as to lack meaning—as contrasted with a more sharply-outlined, although still contested, aspiration for national liberation. Freedom is ambiguous because social forces within colonized societies may define that horizon in relation to their orientation to the means of production and their class. Many, indeed, may see 'freedom' as the freedom to profit in a pseudo-state in the West Bank.

In other moments, Wolfe was slightly more concrete, if often contradictory, in framing end-goals in general, and as applied to Palestine. Most broadly, regimes of race were the enemy, the primary target of oppositional politics, consisting of 'anti-racist solidarities' against white rule.⁸⁹ Yet elsewhere, he referred to 'anti-imperial solidarities', and claimed that in Tibet and in Kashmir, 'their colonisers are not White'.⁹⁰ He

⁸⁵ Adam Hanieh (2011) The Internationalisation of Gulf Capital and Palestinian Class Formation, *Capital & Class* 35(1), pp. 81–106; K. Rabie (2013) Ramallah's Bubbles, *Jadaliyya*; Leila Farsakh (2020) JPS "Hidden Gems" and "Greatest Hits": The Political Economy of Palestine and the Palestinians, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 50(1), pp. 106–111.

⁸⁶ Samar al-Saleh (2022) Britain's Prison Labor Camps: Imperial-Zionist Class War Against Palestinian Men (MA, New York: NYU).

⁸⁷ Compounding this error, but as part of a move to rescue a conceptual apparatus that Wolfe could not but have been aware was inadequate to explain what had happened in Palestine, he writes that the Israeli logic of elimination did not actually seek to erase Palestinians from historical Palestine: "the Jewish state cannot live with Palestinians and it cannot live without them... Israel cannot survive without its Palestinians." He attributes this to "difference" becoming "Jewish" within the settler-population—an oblique way of referring to the distant although theoretical potential of rifts within the settler sector along class lines. The logic of elimination clashes into a functionalist logic whereby Palestinians persist in historical Palestine because their existence stabilizes Zionism. *Traces*, 207.

⁸⁸ Wolfe, *Traces of History*, p. 19.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹⁰ Wolfe, *Recuperating Binarism*, 264.

therefore left it unclear whether his theories were about opposing white rule or opposing imperialism. Strategically, Wolfe insisted that to deconstruct ‘white rule’, a category he deployed without conceptualizing, one would need a political struggle targeting race’s ‘visceral appeal’, a kind of ineffable excess. Yet, such an appeal is amongst the perpetrators and not the victims of racism. What political work is therefore suggested? Do these political solidarities imply programming diversity workshops that treat racism at the level of consciousness? Can one imagine approaching US war crimes committed during its aggression against Iraq or Vietnam as a subjective experience of infantrymen—whether racist, biophysical or affective—rather than US neo-colonial dominance, imperialism, and the petrodollar?

Wolfe’s later work flattened out inequality into unequal access to liberal bourgeois subjecthood, and equality as incorporation into multicultural liberal democratic institutions. Freedom therefore seems to mean dismantling direct political supremacist mechanisms, or those laws and institutions that made whites legally superior to non-whites, as well as the eliminatory outcomes that he claimed were part-and-parcel of settler colonialism. It should be noted that historically, he was aware broader horizons were thinkable. In the context of radical Indigenous politics in Australia, he discussed ‘the demand for community control ... official acknowledgement of a separately constituted ... sovereignty’, focused on transcending through national liberation and landed community control the exclusion of the victims of primitive accumulation from access to the means of production: land.⁹¹ Yet by the 1990s, referring primarily to Australia, he writes that ‘the zero-sum conflict with the settler is constituted at the level of ideology and is waged around the issue of assimilation’.⁹² This acceptance of defeat dovetailed with a revisionist approach to history. Wolfe writes that when the mid-century US Black movement ‘campaigns for equal rights in the mid-twentieth century, much of their political program centered on the demand that they be treated equally with Whites’.⁹³ While this statement has some element of truth, it is far from the totality of the struggle for economic democracy, including economic rights, socialism, and national liberation ranging from Martin Luther King Jr. to Fannie Lou Hamer to Malcolm X.⁹⁴

Furthermore, this framework remains blind to how whites broadly have maintained power over non-whites. In post-apartheid South Africa, post-independence Zimbabwe, or post-Civil Rights America, whites remained supreme, especially in relation to ownership over the means of production.⁹⁵ Wolfe’s focus on particular legal or material modes of colonial rule or racial discrimination frequently blinded him to how a white ruling class maintained power in the US, South Africa, Zimbabwe, or globally over a non-white proletariat and semi-proletariat. Those relationships are legible through theories of neo-colonialism and dependency, and imply a national liberation struggle to overcome them. For Wolfe, by all appearances, such a struggle belonged only to the past. Furthermore, he tended to erase the political diversity within non-white groups,

⁹¹ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, p.205.

⁹² Ibid, p. 3.

⁹³ Wolfe, *Traces of History*, p. 9.

⁹⁴ Monica. M. White (2018) *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill, N.C: UNC Press); Edward Onaci (2020) *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State* (Chapel Hill, N.C: UNC Press).

⁹⁵ Sam Moyo & Paris Yeros (2007) Intervention The Zimbabwe Question and the Two Lefts, *Historical Materialism*, 15, pp. 171–204.

disdaining engagement with revolutionary commitments amongst colonized peoples. While some pursued equality with a racially-identified oppressor, others opted for liberation or socialist planning. While some Indigenous groups in Canada looked to Maoist China,⁹⁶ others in the US support Israel. Such political differences are critical if one wishes to deploy knowledge in service of political ends.

It goes without saying that a critique of Wolfe's exclusion of capitalism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism does not mean denying the role of race/racism in capitalism. The political history of capitalism has entailed a race consciousness, allocating resources according to a racial logic,⁹⁷ and some working-class sectors of Euro-American origins are in a privileged position within the global law of value—the classic labor aristocracy, with attendant race consciousness, and support for imperialism.⁹⁸ But the goals of those with power, as Wolfe frequently conceded, are accumulation, exploitation, and unequal access to the fruits of global labor (on the other hand, in periods of US history those producing a surplus for capital have included poor whites).⁹⁹ We can fruitfully analyze white supremacy as ideology, or political structure crystallized as colonialism, that contributes to accumulation.¹⁰⁰ If white rule is shorthand for the rule of capital, then resistance against the global color line, imperialism, and capitalism smoothly mesh. However, to make anti-racism the goal of political struggle does not cohere with the above.

As regarding Palestine, Wolfe's arguments avoid any question of strategy and alliances in the international system. The history of the Marxist left in Palestine is the history of asking: Who are the Palestinian revolution's friends, and who are its enemies?¹⁰¹ Whereas national liberation movements and some contemporary Palestinian intellectuals wished and wish to weave together many peoples suffering under foreign domination of their land, including neo-colonial domination, Wolfe was disinterested in national liberation and socialist construction. Whereas the national liberation movements sought categories of analysis capable of building many political bridges, Wolfe's analytical categories have spurned (not to say burned) some bridges. This is particularly relevant given that the contemporary Palestine movement is full of denunciations of states that imperialism targets due to their material or ideological support for the Palestinian struggle—as with Iran, Yemen, Syria and North Korea, or for being cradles of the 21st century's attempts at socialist construction or radical nationalist redistribution—like Bolivia, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe.

This demotion of imperialism as a contradiction confronting Palestinian national liberation is indeed contrary to the historical analysis of that movement, particularly its

⁹⁶ George Manuel (2019) *The Fourth World* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota Press).

⁹⁷ Sherene Seikaly (2017) *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press).

⁹⁸ Zak Cope (2019) *The Wealth of (Some) Nations: Imperialism and the Mechanics of Value Transfer* (London: Pluto Press).

⁹⁹ S. Moyo, Praveen. Jha & P. Yeros (2013) The Classical Agrarian Question: Myth, Reality and Relevance Today, *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 2(1), p. 106.

¹⁰⁰ Weber Lopes Góes & Deveson. M. Faustino (2022) Capitalism and Racism in the Longue Durée: An Analysis of Their Reflexive Determinations, *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 11(1), pp. 62–84.

¹⁰¹ PFLP, Strategy for the Liberation of Palestine; S. al-Saleh & L.K. (2021) The Palestinian Left Will Not Be Hijacked – A Critique of Palestine: A Socialist Introduction, *Viewpoint Magazine*. Available at <https://viewpointmag.com/2021/12/11/the-palestinian-left-will-not-be-hijacked-a-critique-of-palestine-a-socialist-introduction/>, accessed January 7, 2022.

radical edges.¹⁰² It is linked to whether victims of settler-colonization have resort to resistance going beyond ‘ideological sanction’, an argument that excludes consideration of regional dynamics central to Palestinian decolonization or national liberation.¹⁰³ Wolfe considers Fanon’s question of ‘relative strength’, the relative capacity for violence of colonial and anti-colonial forces, irrelevant to anti-colonial dynamics amidst relative non-dependency ‘on native labor’.¹⁰⁴ Yet, contemporary Palestinian political struggle rests on ‘relative strength’, understood in regional perspective, given the flows underpinning armed resistance. The Gaza Strip’s tunnel network, and the materiel, logistical, and technological flows from Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah that have helped make it possible, are a question of relative strength.¹⁰⁵ The heyday of Australian Aboriginal mobilization rested on relative strength: the power and credibility of anti-systemic forces in the international system, backstopped by China and the USSR as political alternatives. Although Wolfe affirms such historical struggles in Australia, his gradual decision to erect settler-colonialism as master category theoretically militates against or disorients such strategic thinking. If settler-colonialism, understood as identified by ahistorical processes of elimination in relation to territoriality, is a modality of imperialist political practice, it would follow that Maoist China or Nehru’s India—in distinct periods, supporters to various degrees of the Palestinian national liberation struggle—were imperialist.¹⁰⁶ An anti-imperialist struggle amongst all Indigenous forces directly under the imperialist and settler-colonial boot would indeed exclude such forces—an analysis and strategy well-reflected in swathes of contemporary Palestine organizing and rhetoric, where allies are presumed to be fellow stateless Indigenous groups, rather than states.¹⁰⁷

Finally, national liberation is an outcome. Wolfe stated clearly his wishes (although he could not think about how to achieve them). In contrast to his praise for historical struggles for sovereignty and community control in Australia, he called for a ‘unified Palestine/Israel’. Such a land would lose ‘theocracy’, bringing it into ‘line with modern democracies’. In turn, ‘The ensuing demography of secular political interests can hardly be imagined, but there is no reason to believe that rights and resources would be distributed with anything other than the workaday inequity that prevails in Western democracies’. He added, ‘Edward Said would approve’.¹⁰⁸ This solution, however, is a prescription for neo-colonial and imperialist domination of Palestinian society—quiet on the control of land, agrarian reform, or the end of dispossession, exploitation, or repression of the popular classes.

It is useful to compare Wolfe’s to other notions of a liberated Palestine, not because they are the final word or represent a Palestinian consensus, but to clarify that avoiding class in discussing outcome is normative. One may start with the position of the

¹⁰² PFLP, Strategy for the Liberation of Palestine; Patrick Higgins “The New Hitlerite Dream”: Palestinian Thought on Anglo-American Imperialism from Hiroshima to Partition (Houston: University of Houston).

¹⁰³ Adel Samara (1986) Arab Nationalism, the Palestinian Struggle and an Economic Scenario for a Potential Arab Unity, *Khamsin*, 12

¹⁰⁴ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Wolfe at the time of his death had been silent on Palestinian armed resistance.

¹⁰⁶ Hashim. S. Behbehani (2020) *China’s Foreign Policy in the Arab World, 1955–75: Three Case Studies* (New York: Routledge).

¹⁰⁷ Lila Abu-Lughod (2020) Imagining Palestine’s Alter-Natives: Settler Colonialism and Museum Politics, *Critical Inquiry*, 47(1), pp. 1–27.

¹⁰⁸ Wolfe, Palestine, Project Europe and the (Un-) Making of the New Jew, pp. 329–30.

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine itself, which saw a liberated Palestine as part of a world-wide struggle against imperialism, neo-colonialism, and underdevelopment.¹⁰⁹ Riyadh Mousa braided his analysis of settler-capitalism in Palestine with the need ‘to comprehend the present predicament of Palestinian refugees who are predominantly comprised of the small peasants and the landless during the Mandate and their descendants. At a more practical level, any resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that does not include the right of return and restitution to these ex- peasants is bound to fail’.¹¹⁰ Mousa clarified how settler-colonialism was a process of land theft based on savage post-theft control of colonial property relations, the political mechanism producing social immiseration. Resolution had to be attentive to social deprivation. More expansively, Faiq Mari argues that the PFLP’s interest in visions for a liberated Palestine appeared constantly if elliptically in *Al-Hadaf*, the party paper: through ‘models of building socialism taken from other revolutions’ and ‘visions for national democratic revolutions in Arab countries’.¹¹¹ It is worth noting that such aspirations, and the PFLP itself, were driven into retreat in part through the fall of what Wolfe would term the Soviet ‘settler’ state.

Conclusion

To the extent the foregoing is correct, emphasis on the ‘logic of elimination’ frequently has subtracted from understanding what is happening in Palestine and settler-colonial situations more broadly. Wolfe’s focus led him into a dead-end, unable to think strategically about the struggle he wrote about and unengaged with its historic strategic analysis, including its Arab and anti- imperialist dimensions. He helped alchemize Palestine into an anti-racist struggle of a severely delimited kind. Since the theory reduces settler-colonialism to an opaque and internally inconsistent ‘logic of elimination’, ending settler-colonialism means ending that logic.

Wolfe’s theoretical weaknesses converge around four points: lack of class analysis; lack of revolutionary subjects; lack of revolutionary strategy; and disinterest in revolutionary outcomes. Palestinians, in his body of work, lack political parties, revolutionaries, Marxists, uprisings, and insurrections. They lack strategic documents. They seldom appear as peasants, the landless, or the slum-dwellers. Palestinians, indeed the colonized in general, exist overwhelmingly as victims.

Wolfe famously argued that settler-colonialism has remained ‘impervious to regime change’.¹¹² What, in fact, has happened is that Wolfe redefined settler-colonialism as

¹⁰⁹ ‘The struggle for Palestine today, and all the objective circumstances attendant upon it, will make of this struggle an introduction for the realisation of all the aims of the Arab revolution which are linked together. It is a wide and vast historical-movement launched by one hundred million Arabs in a large area of the world against the forces of evil, aggression and exploitation represented by neo-colonialism and imperialism in this epoch of human history. Finally, the struggle for Palestine will, as regards the Palestinian and Arab masses, be a gateway towards the culture of the age and a transition from a state of under-development to the requirements of modern life.’ PFLP, *Strategy for the Liberation of Palestine*, p. 43.

¹¹⁰ Riyadh Mousa (2006) *The Dispossession of the Peasantry: Colonial Policies, Settler Capitalism, and Rural Change in Palestine, 1918–1948* (Dissertation Utah: University of Utah), conclusion.

¹¹¹ Faiq Mari (2020) *The Arrow Points Left: Visions of Social Transformation in the PFLP’s First Decade* (ETH Zurich), ETH Zurich; A. Samara (1990) *Al-tanmīyya bi al-hamāyya al-sha’bīyya* (Al-Quds: Markaz al-Zahrā’ lil-Dirāsāt w al-Abhāth).

¹¹² Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” p. 402.

those historical-geographical spaces where ‘regime change’ has not yet occurred. The retreat from national liberation politics has occurred hand-in-gauntlet with a relentless advance of US power. In reversing that retreat, it will not help to erase the imperialist contradiction that precipitated it. Finally, the distance from national liberation politics and the rejection of imperialism cannot be reduced to one theoretical misstep or theoretician. Theories live and die within historical soil. A moment of imperialist ascent, rife with liberal, Eurocentric Marxist, and anti-racist strategies of discursive and organizational counter-insurgency was rich soil for an analysis of settler-colonialism shorn of anti-imperialism to grow. Indeed, the dominant ideology within intellectual circles is one of shrugging at or supporting US imperialism, including within substantial portions of the Western academic left.¹¹³ And the dominant ideology does not produce itself. It is actively and constantly produced by social agents acting in history. For that reason, it is critical to trace and anatomize theories that claim, or have been painted, in anti-systemic colors while erasing the contradictions against which national liberation as theory and practice unfurled—imperialism and capitalism. Wolfe arrived in Palestine studies in a bid for further alignment of the Palestinian cause with anti-racist and anti-imperialist efforts, and a return to settler-colonial analysis. Continuing and deepening such theoretical reflexivity is a critical task of our day.

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¹¹³ Aijaz Ahmad (1983) Imperialism and Progress, *Theories of Development: Mode of Production or Dependency*, pp. 33–73 (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage).

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