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*A Marxist-Leninist-Maoist journal for
contending schools of revolutionary thought*

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Editor's Note

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When the first issue of *Material* was released, an upsurge of Palestinian resistance against Israeli colonialism in Gaza, as well as the unrestrained expansion of genocidal violence against the Palestinian people began. We are now over half a year into Israel's genocide in Gaza, and these still unfolding events should serve as a reminder that settler-colonialism is not an historical archaism but an ongoing problematic, embedded in the global articulation of capitalism. Patrick Wolfe famously stated that colonial conquest is "a structure not an event."¹ But so too is it not an event that simply preceded the dawn of capitalism, because it is a structure retained within the historical development of capitalism, affecting and overlapping with its imperialist and neo-colonialist aspects.

Hence, a critical understanding of capitalism as both a mode of production and a world system requires a reflection on the fact that some of the most powerful imperialist states (e.g., the US, Canada and Australia) are also settler-colonial formations. As Israel's soldiers ethnically cleanse Gaza so as to prosecute the most recent historical settler-colonial project, established in 1948, they do so with economic and political support provided by the US and Canada, as well as Germany, France, and Italy, with

¹ Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1998), 2. Although this well-known statement that "the colonizers come to stay—invasion is a structure not an event" first appeared in this 1998 book, it is better known from Wolfe's 2006 essay "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native."

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weapons and ammunition manufactured by their colonial elder siblings. So in this ethnic cleansing of Gaza, there is the resonance of the colonial genocides in the Americas that are not merely past events but are inherent to the very structure of imperialist states. Is it any wonder that the biggest defenders of Israel's genocidal war in Gaza are the same people who consistently deny colonial genocide in the Americas?² And there are also the echoes of the so-called "post-colonies" where once victorious decolonial movements were subjected to neo-colonial imperialism.

But against all of this violent occupation and parasitism there has always been resistance. Struggles for national self-determination, struggles against imperialism and neo-colonialism, continue to persist. If history is determined by class struggle, then part of this determination is the struggles against colonialism and imperialism that have been part of global class struggle since the "rosy dawn" of capitalism. Thus, this second issue of *Material* is concerned with the notion of colonialism and national liberation in the current phase of imperialism.

With this context in mind, we have assembled an issue of *Material* that aims to provide useful analysis for this problematic of colonialism and national liberation. First, we have an article by one of our editors, J. Moufawad-Paul, exploring the ideology of settler-capitalist formations, followed by an essay by Alexandra Lepine focusing on the ideology of constructed settler victimhood. In March of this year, we had the fortune to engage in an in-depth interview with the West Bank scholar and activist Abdaljawad Omar about the current conjuncture in Palestine, which appears next. Then K. Murali, who is on our editorial board, provides an update of his article on neo-colonialism. Owain Rhys Phillips's article about the Republican socialist struggle in Ireland, in which he formulates a critique of the compradorification of Sinn Féin, follows. Our *From the Archives* text this issue comes from discussions about colonialism and national self-determination, which were essential to the Second Congress of

² In Canada, "journalists" such as Barbara and Jonathan Kay have consistently written opinion editorials denying residential school genocide while also defending Israel's war on Gaza.

the Third International. And finally, we have the conclusion of T. Derbent's article on "Lenin and War," which was initiated with our first issue.

Interspersed in these pages we have the poetry of Hasan Hüseyin Korkmazgil, the fiction prose of Benjanun Sriduangkaew, and the art of Taysir Batniji. . . . Because even in the midst of this horror show, where colonial genocide is accompanying ecocide, there still remains an aesthetic hope of the future, just as there remains resistance.

In terms of *Material* as a larger project, we are happy to announce that we launched our website in March: materialjournal.net. On it, you can access previous issues either as full, downloadable PDFs, or by text or image, as well as also reader responses to published articles. If you would like to submit a response for review, please see Submissions, located at the end of the journal or on the website.

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The Immanent Garrison: Settlerism as Institutionalized Ideology¹

Joshua Moufawad-Paul

As social distancing measures in the COVID-19 pandemic became normalized throughout the world in the spring of 2020, within the US and Canada a significant number of reactionaries began to launch protests against the quarantine. Demanding that their countries “reopen for business,” these protesters evinced a hodgepodge of right-wing political positions. From Trump supporters to conspiracy theory libertarians, to fascist militia types, to extreme Evangelicals, they complained about “big government,” that coronavirus was a deep state conspiracy, that the government did not have the right to decide what their bodies could or could not do (i.e., a “my body my choice” argument made by the same groups of people with a history of pushing anti-abortion laws). Largely united by their overwhelming whiteness, left social media quickly called them the “Flu Klux Klan”—an appropriate moniker not only considering their politics (those who were not outright white supremacists embraced implicit racist

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at a University of Connecticut political theory workshop in December 2023. Special thanks to August Shipman, Justin Theodra, and the other participants who provided feedback.

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assumptions) but because these protests, unlike the equally reactionary protests throughout Europe, were paradigmatic of the *settlerism* that generated the KKK.

When members of these protests armed themselves and marched on government buildings, as they did in Michigan at the end of April 2020, this was not simply a racist inversion of armed Black Panthers entering the California State Capitol in 1967; it was a manifestation of a rationality that is foundational to settler-capitalist social formations.² Whereas the historical Black Panther event of 1967 was met with resistance and horror by the repressive state apparatus, the white militias marching into Michigan government buildings in 2020 registered little to no resistance. In the contemporary context, where settler-capitalist police forces murder black people with impunity—as they would with George Floyd later in the pandemic—or where in Standing Rock and Wet’suwet’en violent states of emergency are declared against anti-colonial land defense, it might seem surprising that armed protesters marching on government buildings were greeted with tolerance. A common-sense interpretation of this tolerance suggested, at the time, that it had to do with “white privilege,” and yet this notion is both imprecise and insufficient. The fact that armed white militia reactionaries were allowed entrance to government buildings without igniting the state of emergency measures that would later be leveled at the rebellions responding to George Floyd’s execution indicates that something more materially meaningful than “privilege” was happening. And after the Biden election, when the same demographic stormed the Capitol,

² The term *settler-capitalism* has been used by myself and other radical academics (such as, for example, Tyler Shipley’s usage in *Canada In The World*) for capitalist states that came into being as “capitalist” through settler-colonial conquest and still function, despite being capitalist formations, as settler-colonies. As Shipley puts it, settler-capitalist formations are those where “colonialism runs through [their] entire history. . . [which is] driven by one fundamental material goal—the destruction of Indigenous political economic practices and their displacement by capitalism” [Shipley, *Canada In The World* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing), 1]. I have referred to this kind of maintenance of settler-colonialism elsewhere as *sublimated colonialism*, since it pushes the colonial foundation of these capitalist formations under the surface while still maintaining key aspects of settler-colonial ideology. Nation-states such as the US, Canada, Australia, and Israel are iconic representations of this settler-capitalism. The US and Canada are perhaps the most globally significant representations of settler-capitalism because they both unify their internal colonial apparatus with capitalism and worldwide imperialism.

there was a similar tolerance (while the so-called “insurrectionists” were later charged, the police did not storm the Capitol and have them violently arrested), just as there has been a tolerance for anti-vaxxers (whose composition is largely white settler) whose demonstrations eventually targeted hospitals and doctors. There was also the Kyle Rittenhouse trial where a white vigilante who traveled to a different state to shoot “rioters” in the Black Lives Matter protest was treated as a victim, whereas the people he had shot and murdered were prohibited from being called victims by order of the judge, and Rittenhouse was eventually acquitted on all counts.

Indeed, what this tolerance of armed white militias and white vigilantes revealed was the settlerism that largely characterizes settler-capitalism. That is, the ideology of the colonial garrison that is foundational to settler-capitalism and, because it is foundational, has become institutionalized in every settler-capitalist formation. Legal police forces are reticent to repress these “Flu Klux Klanners” because the former emerged as a “legitimate” (legally normative) repressive state apparatus from the same colonial roots. What we are witnessing, then, is a confrontation of the legal settler-capitalist state with its paramilitary double, the latter being that which has always supported and in fact generated the basis of the settler-colonial repressive apparatus. Hence, the confrontation between legally sanctioned state forces and reactionary militia is just a confrontation between the settler-capitalist state and its garrison paramilitary—a non-antagonistic contradiction between predatory siblings.

As we shall discuss below, this relationship between the formal repressive state apparatus and the informal settler militia has existed since the initial conquest, when settler enclaves functioned as the frontline for colonial warfare. Indeed, as the most recent settler-capitalist formation of Israel demonstrates, due its proximity to the genocidal foundational event of its conquest (the Nakba), the relationship between the formal Israeli military and the settlers in its frontier spaces (Gaza and the West Bank) mirror those between the fledgling US military and the settlers in the frontiers of the westward push. Just as the early US settlers would initiate violent encounters with Indigenous nations, causing the latter to fight back, which was then used as an excuse to call in the army to clear the land, today’s Israel settlers do the same in their frontier spaces—as the IOF’s (Israeli Occupying Forces) response on October 7, 2023 demonstrated. Larger than the

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formal and informal violent settler forces, however, is the consciousness they share with their colonial societies as a whole, which legitimates their relationship. We can call this consciousness *settlerism*.

Settlerism is *the institutionalized ideology of the colonial garrison*. I do not mean ideology in the simple sense of ideas organized into a coherent ethos or in the pejorative sense of “false ideas.” Rather, I am referring to the Marxist concept of ideology developed by philosophers such as Gramsci and Althusser that is concerned with analyzing how ruling class ideas become part of a “common sense” hegemony and thus part of state apparatuses. Ideology not only emerges from material facts as a class-based way of accounting for or justifying these facts but also becomes what Marx and Engels called “a self-determining concept” that exhibits a material force.³ For example, the liberal capitalist ideology that humans are naturally selfish and competitive individuals is not only a conceptual structuring of similar ideas (as can be found in the work of philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, Mill, and others) but is also formalized in legal, political, and economic structures which socialize persons into individual rights bearers, free laborers competing with other free laborers, etc. On the one hand, the notion that humans are essentially competitive and selfish comes from the apprehension of a “war of all against all” during the long and violent transition to capitalism. On the other hand, it takes on a new material force in how institutions are structured and citizens socialized.

Thus settlerism as institutionalized garrison ideology and culture has both a material origin and a material force. Every settler-colonial project begins by sending its settlers into spaces where these settlers are “surrounded” by the original inhabitants. Although it is the case that settlers were indeed surrounded by the people whose lands they were invading, they also imagined themselves as besieged, inverting “the role of aggressor so that colonialism is made to look like self-defence.”⁴ Settler-colonies in the midst of “Indian Country” imagined they were “surrounded forts” and thus “the false image is what emerges when a critique of militarized life

³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998), 70.

⁴ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Minor Compositions, 2013), 17.

is predicated on the forgetting of the life that surrounds it.”⁵ That is, settler-colonies established themselves as garrisons with the intention of conquest, treated the populations surrounding these initial colonial enclaves as hostile to conquest (because obviously the surrounding populations would not want to be conquered and decimated), and thus generated a militarized life premised on dehumanizing the colonized.

As Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz puts it in regards to the colonization of the regions that would become the USA:

In the beginning, Anglo settlers organized irregular units to brutally attack and destroy unarmed Indigenous women, children, and old people using unlimited violence in unrelenting attacks. During nearly two centuries of British colonization, generations of settlers, mostly farmers, gained experience as “Indian fighters” outside any organized military institution.⁶

Throughout *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* Dunbar-Ortiz charts the ways in which the early settlers functioned as an armed garrison, where every settler man, woman, and child was encouraged to arm themselves to attack the surrounding Indigenous population. Settler-colonialism always begins, in the US and elsewhere, as a paramilitary confrontation between the garrison and the surround. When these settler-colonial formations achieved hegemony, eventually transforming into settler-capitalist formations, this garrison ideology became institutionalized. Not only did it result in official colonial police/military forces (such as the RCMP, the FBI, or the IDF⁷), laws that were brought into being to recognize the especial importance of settler militias remained. Such forces not only policed colonized populations, but this policing was key to the reproduction of capitalism within these formations since, as Glen Sean Coulthard has established, the development and reproduction of capitalism within settler-capitalist societies is also dependent on an ongoing “primitive accumulation” that requires the maintenance of settler-colonial-

⁵ Harney and Moten, 17.

⁶ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 58.

⁷ (RCMP) Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Canada), (FBI) Federal Bureau of Investigation (US), (IDF) Israeli Defense Forces (Israel).

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ism. Hence, “capitalism continues to play a core role in dispossessing [the colonized] of [their] lands and self-determining authority.”⁸

In fact, when we look at the most recent example of settler-capitalism—the state of Israel which was established in 1948—we can see the elements of the garrison and surround that marked the conquest of the Americas and other remaining settler-capitalist formations unfolding in real time. The settlements, deemed illegal by the UN, that have been established in “the occupied territories” of the West Bank and Gaza, are populated by the most reactionary, armed settlers who think of themselves as frontiers-people surrounded by hostile barbarians and thus function as a para-military population. But even though they chose to settle in these spaces so as to expand the lebensraum of “Eretz Israel,”⁹ they still conceptualize themselves as besieged heroes and victims, ciphers of the only civilization that matters. When Hamas and other resistance groups attacked the settlements in Gaza in October 2023, their supporters immediately treated them as victims—“inverting the role of aggressor” as Moten and Harney noted above—by treating the colonized Palestinian population as an aggressive surround. Immediately, the Israeli military revealed its support of its paramilitary settlement wing by murdering and bombing into submission an entire civilian population. What the genocidal war upon Gaza at the end of 2023 resembles, though, is the material relationship that is foundational to every settler-capitalist formation: the ethnic cleansing carried out by the formal colonial armies and police has always followed the paramilitary garrison incursions. In the case of settler-capitalist formations that are hundreds of years old, this relationship has become an immanent practice.

Hence, in the context of settler-capitalist formations that are hundreds of years old, armed white militias manifesting now are not an exceptional manifestation; they are in fact part of the settlerism that is

⁸ Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 176.

⁹ *Lebensraum* was the notion of German National expansionism that was a central ideology for Nazi expansionism. *Eretz Israel* is a similar concept which seeks to expand Israel so that it claims the territory held by Ancient Israel. New Yorker article *The Extreme Ambitions of West Bank Settlers* (www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/the-extreme-ambitions-of-west-bank-settlers) is an exposé of what these settlers think, particularly their unabashed paramilitary ambitions.

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essential to these social formations and that generated the very police and military that function to reproduce these states' repressive apparatus. When white settlers arm themselves to defend their settler states and march into government buildings, the reason they are tolerated is because they are part of the same garrison ethos that led to the formation of settler-capitalist repressive apparatuses in the first place. The colonial garrison that is inherent to settler-capitalist societies (both for the reproduction/maintenance of colonial and capitalist relations) is merely confronting itself.

In order to understand the aforementioned reactionary manifestations as generated by the institutionalized ideology of the garrison, I will examine and discuss a general conception of settlerism. After examining this concept, I will investigate how the immanence of settlerism permits liberal and "progressive" expressions that, though different in form, are ultimately not in an antagonistic contradiction with these explicit and reactionary manifestations of the garrison. The overall point is to understand how settlerist ideology functions as a powerful "self-determining concept" that not only permits these insurgent moments of fascism but that galvanizes liberal ideology (itself a buttress of everyday capitalism) and can undermine egalitarian anti-capitalist movements. To pursue liberation in a settler-capitalist context requires not only the confrontation with capitalism and its "common sense" ideology but also the confrontation with settler-colonial ideology. In these contexts, without the overthrow of the immanent colonial garrison there can be no overthrow of capitalism.

To speak of the institutionalization of garrison culture and to examine how the expression of this immanent garrison is the voice of settlerism is to recognize that the originary event of colonialism is also an ongoing process. In their introduction to a special issue of *Social Text*, Jodi Byrd, Alyosha Goldstein, Jodi Melamed, and Chandan Reddy write:

We ask instead, how the terms of academic and political debate today would be transformed if an understanding of colonization as ongoing and the lived experience of colonialism as a condi-

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tion of possibility were prioritized and considered as something that critical analysis had an enduring responsibility to address.¹⁰

An investigation of settlerism, or the ideological institutionalization of garrison culture, is one way of examining how colonialism persists as a living process.

A Basic Conception of Settlerism

Settlerism is a term that was popularized at the end of the 1970s by J. Sakai in his underground classic, *Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat*. This book has been a somewhat controversial text in radical and activist circles due to its thesis that the working classes of settler-colonial societies—that is, the working classes who are valorized as the “official” sector of labor by colonial society—are not the actual “proletariat” in the Marxian sense but, rather, “parasitic, dependent upon the super-exploitation of oppressed peoples.”¹¹ By tracing the history of the US labor movement, Sakai argues that colonial chauvinism has always affected the working class of settler society—this society being an “occupation garrison”¹²—in such a way that, because it is able to possess a certain level of real or perceived assets due to the material fact of settler-colonialism, it has a material investment in colonialism and the capitalist exploitation that was built on these colonial foundations. In such a context, Sakai claims that

the mass of the lower middle classes, the huge labor aristocracy, and most workers are fused together by a common national way of life and a common ideology as oppressors. [They] share a way of life that apes the bourgeoisie. . . . The real world of desperate toil, the world of the proletarians who own nothing but their la-

¹⁰ Jodi A. Byrd, Alyosha Goldstein, Jodi Melamed, and Chandan Reddy, ‘Predatory Value: Economies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities,’ *Social Text*, Issue 135 (June 2018): 7.

¹¹ J. Sakai, *Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat* (Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2014), 9.

¹² Sakai, 141.

bor power, is looked down upon with contempt and fear by the Euro-Amerikans.¹³

Settlerism, then, also forms the social consciousness that develops from this colonial social being: an identification with settler society and its values, a refusal to recognize the necessity of anti-colonial struggle, a spontaneous patriotism that is summoned whenever one's social standing as settler is threatened, a habitual failure of large segments of the settler working class to possess the radical potential that working class movements in social formations that are not also defined by settler-colonialism have historically demonstrated. "Settlers are not," writes Sakai, "waiting passively for 'the Movement' to come organize them—the point is that they already have many movements, causes, and organizations of their own. That's the problem."¹⁴

During the Columbus Epoch of imperialism, when the most powerful European nation-states were dividing the globe among each other, settlerism was always explicit: the garrison mentality of the settler-state, tied directly to a pride in the colonizer's distant motherland, existed on the surface of social relations. Colonizers saw themselves as part of a "civilized" frontier pushing itself into a "savage" hinterland. After the event of secession—where the US and other colonies seceded from their motherlands without ending colonialism—and eventually following the decolonization movements that broke the back of that period of imperialism, the settler-colonialism that persisted, notably in some of the most powerful capitalist nations, mutated. As colonial relations were sublimated, the settlerism became insidious; the garrison was institutionalized in such a way that hegemonic consent to its totalization became normative.¹⁵ Settler-capitalist formations are the garrison as a social whole where its institutionalization often takes on a sublimated form, lurking beneath liberal discourse.

(Although the most recent settler-colonial venture of Israel repeated, rapidly and violently, the hundreds of years of colonial history that these older settler formations normalized, it still found inclusion in the settlerist project by a process of normalization. After the Nakba of 1948, it adapted

¹³ Sakai, 346.

¹⁴ Sakai, 356.

¹⁵ This is a brief summation of an ideological process I discussed in my paper *Sublimated Colonialism* (2013).

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itself to a sublimated form of colonialism where it carried out an apartheid violence, described in Jasbir Puar's *The Right to Maim*, designed primarily to debilitate.¹⁶ Such a violence was part of the normalization of the immanent garrison. But since Israel is still a young colonial power, this kind of normalization was not enough; it mutated into an explicit moment of colonial genocidal war in October 2023. But even this mutation, due to the hegemony of settler-colonial powers, was treated as normal by the imperialist state of affairs.)

This normalization of the society-as-garrison is significant because it signals the ways in which settler-capitalist formations are able to obscure the class warfare of the mode of production by an appeal to a larger settler project, as was the case since conquest. For example, class hatred could be redirected in the colonial frontier: the poor and exploited colonizers could be made to focus on the racial Other as an enemy rather than the wealthy colonizers, and the doctrines of racial hierarchy, religious right, and European superiority were useful in the construction of a class collaborationist garrison society. Every colonizer, regardless of their status in the class hierarchy, could be united against Indigenous and enslaved populations. They could even materially benefit from it. Dunbar-Ortiz speaks of a “cross-class mind-set” as “the first instance of class leveling based on imagined racial sameness—the origin of white supremacy, the essential ideology of colonial projects in America and Africa.”¹⁷ Hence, while being the ideology that “buys off” the white working class (in W. E. B. Du Bois's sense of the “psychological wage” where white workers “were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white”),¹⁸ settlerism also cuts across social strata, ideologically uniting settlers in the garrison. Before, during, and after the American War of Independence, for example, the settler-separatists were united, regardless of their social class, in the desire to found a white nation. (The same sensibility could be found in Canada, Australia, and later Apartheid South Africa and Israel, among other places.) They were a unified colonial garrison that saw the internal

¹⁶ Jasbir Puar, *The Right To Maim* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

¹⁷ Dunbar-Ortiz, 37.

¹⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 573.

class hierarchies as less important than the establishment of colonial hegemony. Settlerist ideology emanates from this basis; it is the unifying ethos of a disparate group of colonizers who were forced to see themselves as a garrison society against the Indigenous and subjugated African surround. In this sense what would come to be known as “whiteness” would also signify “the right to title, sovereignty, ownership.”¹⁹

Therefore, when we speak of settler-colonialism now (particularly settler-capitalism) we need to also speak of the consciousness it elicits. This consciousness is produced by *being* in a settler-colonial social formation—the dominant way of seeing the world according to the concrete fact of settler-colonialism—that is similar to the period in which settler-colonialism was the dominant form of imperialist expansion but is marked by the break from that period: the transformation of the motherland-colony relationship, the emergence of powerful capitalist states that are the product of that period and that maintain “internal” colonies.²⁰

In nation-states such as the US and Canada there is an immanent garrison culture that haunts the social formation. At times this garrison culture is marked by its absence, by the refusal to recognize that these social formations maintain internal colonies, as if colonialism happened in the past, a regrettable calamity, rather than being an ongoing process. At other times, when colonized peoples in these territories resist eradication, everything that defined this garrison mentality in the previous period of colonialism erupts. The contradictions sharpen: settler towns bordering colonized reserves are suddenly filled with white supremacists; liberal subjects who, just days before these resistant events, were pleasant neighbors become committed garrison subjects. During the 1990 Oka Crisis in Québec, the settlers burned Mohawk effigies and lined up on

¹⁹ Devin Zane Shaw, *Philosophy of Antifascism: Punching Nazis and Fighting White Supremacy* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2020), 167.

²⁰ I have placed “internal” in scare quotes because of Jodi Byrd’s work in troubling this discourse. “The ‘internal,’ however,” she writes, “reifies colonized indigenous peoples as ‘minorities within’ countries such as New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and the United States” [Byrd, *The Transit of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 135]. Considering that colonized nations were in fact considered to be foreign nations at the time of colonial contact/conquest, treating them as “internal” to colonial hegemony tends to delete the fact that aspirations for national self-determination demand an externality to colonial power.

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the highway to throw rocks at the children and elders of their Iroquois neighbors.²¹

A more liberal settlerism, no less pernicious, is often demonstrated by the mainstream media covering these events. Although I will examine the liberal expression of settlerism in the next section, a few things need to be said about it here in relation to the notion of the settlerist “cross-class alliance.” In the case of the Oka Crisis, for example, the conflict was coded according to ethnocentric categories where the savage/civilized paradigm was maintained in an apparently sober manner: the Mohawk resistance to settler incursion, we were told, was the result of an Oka golf course expanding onto a native “burial ground.” Such language codes the event according to settlerist values, informing viewers that this event, while lamentable, is based on some misunderstanding between capitalist modernity and pre-capitalist primitivism. Burial grounds, after all, are territories that are vaguely neolithic, similar to an archaeological dig. But when you go to Kahnésatake, when you observe this “burial ground” you will witness a cemetery that is identical to any other village cemetery. The buried dead of the colonized, the monuments of mourning central to all societies, are denied even when their “burial grounds” are identical to settler cemeteries. Colonial existence is immediately archaeological. Hence, the Oka event was already scripted according to settlerist logic: a clash between a civilizing frontier and a pre-modern hinterland—between the garrison and the surround.

The sublimation of actually existing colonialism is such that, due to the fact that the colony has become its own motherland, the settlers have come to see themselves as the natives. The surviving Indigenous peoples are treated as fossils, nations destined for the dustbin of history, who have surrendered the land to its proper owners—just as Tamenund, at the end James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, prophesies that the land of his people will properly belong to the colonizer: “[t]he pale-faces are masters of the earth, and the time of the red-men has not yet come

²¹ See, for example, Alanis Obomsawin’s masterful documentaries: *Kahnésatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993) and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* (2000). In both of these films Indigenous subjects speak of how people they once counted as neighbors suddenly turned on them, sometimes in the most violently racist manner.

again.”²² Again, garrison culture is marked by its supposed absence: if there is no settler, because the settler has become the native, then there is no garrison. In *The Transit of Empire*, for example, Jodi Byrd discusses

well-established colonialist discourses that figure the emergent United States as “American,” a crucible of naming transformations that ultimately serves to supplant indigenous peoples with settlers and figures colonialists as the “natives” of the land, all the while erasing American Indians from consciousness in the process.²³

But when colonized subjects reassert their existence, settlerism reemerges in force; its subjects are greatly unsettled by the fact that they must admit their colonizing status, that there are nations that still challenge colonial business as usual. After all,

[w]hy should the settler garrison let the “Indians” live inside the walls of the fort? There is an arrogance but at the same time an underlying feeling of being threatened and besieged by “those people”—which occasionally breaks out in collective hysteria.²⁴

Settler Subjectivities

Settlerism possesses two general articulations that are ultimately unified by their fidelity to the normative status of settler-colonialism: 1. reactionary and conservative, 2. liberal and progressive. Both categorical expres-

²² James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1854), 260.

²³ Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 142. This pernicious “nativism” (i.e., a reactionary settlerist identification with the land taken through conquest) has been analyzed thoroughly by other scholars, so I will not repeat what has been adequately established by their excellent work. See, for example, Aileen Moreton Robinson’s *The White Possessive* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2015) which, in its identification of whiteness with possession, examines the ways in which this “nativist” possession function. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz has also described this tendency in *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*. Here it is also worth noting the “pretendian” phenomenon—a phenomenon that in the past two years has gained a lot of attention—where white scholars have masqueraded as Indigenous. In this sense there has been a white possessiveness regarding Indigenous identity itself, the grossest iteration of nativism. Algonquin scholar Veldon Coburn has spoken a lot about this problematic.

²⁴ Sakai, 353.

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sions of settlerism have their own internal variations but, on the whole, generate different settler-subjects. Or, more accurately, these two general categories generate different *styles* of settler subjectivity because, just as the bourgeoisie becomes monolithic in times of capitalist crisis, in times of colonial crisis (which overlaps, in settler-capitalist societies, with capitalist crisis), settlerism also approaches homogeneity. Indeed, during the particular colonial crisis that erupted in Gaza in October 2023, both the liberal and conservative wings of Israeli society—both the pro- and anti-Netanyahu populations—were overwhelmingly in agreement with the genocidal war.

Since ideology is a “self-determining concept” that exerts a material force, it generates subject positions. We are socialized from birth to see the world through the prisms of numerous (and often conflicting) ideologies, the most powerful of which are those connected to what Althusser has called “ideological state apparatuses.”²⁵ Numerous anti-colonial scholars have discussed the way in which the divided world of colonialism has generated particular subjectivities. But I want to examine how settlerism generates subjects that participate in an immanent garrison of settler-colonial maintenance. As noted earlier, what makes these subject positions compelling is that there are material benefits in being a settler in a settler-colonial social context. “This is not surprising,” writes Sandy Grande, “since the construction of the settler state has, at every stage, relied on identity and cultural politics for its reconsolidation.”²⁶

The reactionary variant of settlerism is its baseline expression and what has been largely described so far: the unapologetic acceptance of colonial-

²⁵ Since this is not a paper on the theory of ideology and the subject, I won't go into much detail about the debates around this conception of ideology and subject formation. I will note, however, that although I agree partly with the way in which Althusser develops, following Gramsci, the conception of ideology, I disagree with the almost totalizing sense of ideological subject formation that results from his treatment of this problematic in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (Louis Althusser, *On The Reproduction of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2014), 232-272). That is, for Althusser there is the sense that there can be no subject outside of interpellation, thus lending itself to interpretation where persons are programmed as subjects by the structure, the latter of which almost becomes a metaphysical principle. This problematic of the subject and its relationship to ideology forms the basis of a book project in which I'm currently enmeshed.

²⁶ Sandy Grande, “Accumulation of the Primitive: the limits of liberalism and the politics of Occupy Wallstreet,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 3:3-4 (2013): 373.

ism, the consciousness that was normative in the period of imperialism in which settler-colonies were established. The subject who understands themselves as a settler and is not ashamed to explicitly defend the colonial order exhibits the most honest manifestation of settlerism. Such an understanding lurks under the surface of a given colonial order, erupting whenever the colonized disrupt the day-to-day existence of the average settler. The aforementioned “Flu Klux Klanners” are an example of this expression. But so too are the conservative politicians who consistently demand fidelity to “family values” as they worry about the surround—ideologically distorted as “black on black violence,” attacks on Christian morality, immigrant “pollution” of the social fabric—while also proclaiming that it is necessary to let the poor die and to ignore climate science as they build pipelines through Indigenous land. The white militia member, the clearest expression of the settler garrison, is ideologically united with the establishment conservative in a very simple sense; they both openly celebrate colonialism, they both openly embrace reactionary values. The fact that the wealthy political conservative is part of the very political hegemony that the small-time reactionary would otherwise dismiss as “big government” seems to mean nothing to the latter. The open commitment to white supremacy unites them in the “cross-class alliance” that has typified settler-colonialism.²⁷

The second and more “progressive” expression of settlerism—the hallmark of sublimated colonialism—is typified by the settler who is ashamed, to some extent, by the colonial past but is unwilling to interrogate how this past determines a colonial present. Sometimes this kind of settlerism devolves into the first type when the “progressive” settler’s status is challenged, but mostly it permits a daily denial of the persistence of colonialism through an affirmation of ancestral sins. In this sense, writes Jodi Byrd, “Indians are lamentable, but not grievable. . . [t]he lamentable is pitiable, but not remediable. It is past and regrettable.”²⁸ By recognizing that a crime was enacted in the past while simultaneously maintaining that the present is not affected by this past, an “enlightened” settlerism can assuage its guilty colonial conscience by repressing the conscious apprehension of

²⁷ Far Right movements are “system-loyal” when the settlerist cross-class alliance is stable, they are “insurrectionary” when it is not. (Shaw, 177-178)

²⁸ Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, 38.

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a colonial present.²⁹ “People often feel guilty about their ancestors killing all those Indians years ago,” writes Vine Deloria Jr., “But. . . [j]ust the last two decades have seen a more devious but hardly less successful war waged against Indian communities.”³⁰ Although Deloria Jr. wrote those words in 1969, the persistence of settler-colonialism means they still hold true: colonialism is not

a temporarily situated experience which occurred at some relatively fixed period in history but [is that] which unfortunately continues to have negative consequences for [colonized] communities in the present.³¹

This second expression of settlerism is most commonly expressed as a liberal politics, coextensive with liberal conceptions of capitalism and imperialism, and is thus quite comfortable with settler-capitalism. But there are also “progressive” expressions of settlerism that are not explicitly liberal and manifest within ostensibly anti-capitalist spaces. There is, for example, a fetishism of Indigenous culture where progressive settlers recognize land claims as a performance rite, where Indigenous representatives are invited to perform, and where the conception of the “decolonial” is merely about recognizing the equal status of native culture. Since this kind of cultural fetishism is largely the expression of colonial guilt, and usually lacks a formal political program, it is hard to pin down beyond the level of affect.

²⁹ The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is a good example of the guilty colonial conscience. Commissioned by the Liberal government under Justin Trudeau, it was intended to bring about reconciliation between Canadian society as a whole and its colonized First Nations. In fact, the Trudeau government has not tired of speaking about “reconciliation” with and “recognition” of “Canada’s First Peoples.” Although the TRC produced a document demonstrating all of the harms enacted on the Indigenous populations of Canada, especially including those that continued to affect and structure colonized life in Canada—the legacy of Residential Schools, the ongoing reality of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Children (MMIW)—the Commission, rather than what the Commission recommended, was enough for liberal Canadians to feel good about themselves. Hence the convention of *recognizing* the harms but not doing anything to rectify them became a normal way of assuaging the guilty colonial conscience. Reactionaries, on the other hand, simply dismissed the TRC and denied genocide.

³⁰ Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 54.

³¹ Coulthard, 125.

More pernicious, however, are anti-capitalist organizations and individuals who think that the national self-determination of the colonized is either inessential to the struggle against settler-capitalist formations or that such struggles should be commanded by settler-led organizations, refusing to admit that a strata of the working class benefits from and/or has a consciousness determined by settler-colonialism. What unites this entire expression, liberals and would-be anti-capitalists, is a cosmetic appraisal of the colonial past and its relationship to the colonial present, along with the fact that moments of anti-colonial revolt demanding sovereignty are seen as worrisome. At the end of the day, every settler whose subjectivity has not broken from settlerism remains part of the garrison.

Liberal Settlerism: the Hamilton paradigm

When Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical *Hamilton* was released in 2015 it was immediately embraced by liberal progressives. Despite the fact that it concerned the settler separatist Alexander Hamilton and was about the American War of Independence led by colonizing slaveowners, the musical was hailed as "transgressive" and "progressive" by various pundits. Despite the middling hip-hop, extravagant production values, and clever race-flipping of the cast, *Hamilton* in fact demonstrates how settlerism is more than a manifestation of the garrison in situations of conflict and emergency. Settlerism is also the normalization and sublimation of colonialism.

Hamilton largely functions to justify one of the key founding myths of US settler-colonialism: that the American War of Independence was a valuable "revolution" that contributed to the progress of humanity. This myth is often referenced by well-meaning liberals in opposition to contemporary imperialist interventions or local anti-people legislation. Such a narrative laments current practices of the US nation-state by encouraging a return to the values of "the founding fathers." Since reactionaries also encourage a return to these values and thus understand them in a different manner ("Make America Great Again"), *Hamilton* is an ideological locus that codes the founding event of the nation according to a pseudo-progressive narrative. *Hamilton* might veil itself in transgressive and progressive clothing (hip-hop, racially detoured protagonists) but this is less important than

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the political line it preserves: the justification of the colonial foundation of what would become the most predatory nation in human history.

Whereas the US founding myth of rebellion against British dominance appears to be the justification of revolutionary values in the face of colonial hegemony, the truth is that the American War of Independence was less a world historical revolution and more of a settler-colonial secession designed to operationalize values that were more reactionary than those imposed by the motherland. Indeed, Gerald Horne argues that this event was a counterrevolution seeking to prolong slavery and was thus resisted by the stolen and enslaved black population.³² Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz points out the ways in which this so-called revolution was simultaneously an unfolding of colonial genocide, concluding that “[t]hroughout the war between separatist settlers and the forces of the monarchy, armed settlers waged total war against Indigenous people, largely realizing their objectives.”³³ These objectives were the annihilation of Indigenous nations within the territory of the original colonies followed by, upon achieving independence, an exterminatory westward expansion.

Since the US neo-colonial project is often justified according to the values of “freedom” that were supposedly realized in its foundation, thus centering it as an exceptional state, we should treat appeals to this founding myth as noxious self-justifications that ignore the oppressive and genocidal logic of settler-colonialism. There is a reason US schools teach that the American War of Independence was the basis of global liberty and equality despite the fact that this is far from the truth. Such a discourse is designed to justify the right to imperialist intervention. Indeed, Canadian liberal imperialist apologist Michael Ignatieff argues that the US has the right to “spread” the notion of liberty proclaimed in its War of Independence to the rest of the world through imperialist intervention. Writing of Hamilton’s political rival, Thomas Jefferson, Ignatieff asserts:

Think about the explosive force of Jefferson’s self-evident truth. First white working men, then women, then blacks, then the disabled, then gay Americans—all have used his words to demand that the withheld promise be delivered to them. Without Jeffer-

³² See Gerald Horne’s *The Counter-Revolution of 1776* (2014).

³³ Dunbar-Ortiz, 75–76.

son, no Lincoln, no Emancipation Proclamation. Without the slave-owning Jefferson, no Martin Luther King Jr. And the dream of white and black citizens together reaching the Promised Land. . . . Jefferson's words have had the same explosive force abroad.³⁴

Despite the fact that Jefferson and Hamilton were political rivals, the above passage could easily be rewritten with Hamilton as the subject. The point is that the American War of Independence is given an exceptional status that represents a progressive unfolding of freedom for everyone everywhere. Those who choose to lionize Jefferson instead of Hamilton, or vice versa, are united on this presumption: the progressive singularity of the US secession from its former motherland. We should pause to marvel at the sheer hubris of Ignatieff's proclamation—his assumption, without any historical rigor, that a racist plantation colony's secession was responsible for generating every struggle against oppression and exploitation. In order to accept it we would need to delete all of the anti-colonial rebellions leading up to the US Civil War: the narratives of Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Sitting Bull, Tecumseh, and others would have to be dismissed or severely revised. As for the rest of the world, the values of the American War of Independence did not carry much "explosive force," as Ignatieff suggests. Revolutionary movements that referenced European revolutions placed themselves in the tradition of the French Revolution (as C. L. R. James discusses in *The Black Jacobins* in regards to Haiti), and then later the Paris Commune, and there is little to no reference of the American War of Independence.

And yet, what Ignatieff writes is precisely what is taught in the US and even in Canada—which sees itself united with but different from the US settler project—and this is a hallmark of settlerist ideological education: the proclamation of the garrison's establishment as the foundation of an unfolding freedom. Such an education justifies the garrison, sanctioning its right to annihilate the surround and establish its civilization. Beyond the legitimization of a violent settlerist ethos, Ignatieff's understanding of history is particularly sterile, representing the kind of utopian thinking that is often projected upon Marxism: without horrendous colonial

³⁴ Michael Ignatieff, "Who Are Americans To Think That Freedom Is Theirs To Spread?" (www.nytimes.com/2005/06/26/magazine/who-are-americans-to-think-that-freedom-is-theirs-to-spread.html).

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and racist violence, without imperialism, we would not have freedom; the unfolding of this freedom, initiated and maintained by imperialism, will naturally lead to more progressive thinkers and the progressive flourishing of human rights—all of which are somehow conceived as the property of, because they were supposedly originated by colonial and imperialist conquest. Ignatieff makes the imperialism of modernity the origin of every meaningful value.

Thus, if the horrendous imperialist event of the United States of America is conceived as the generator of every progressive value (despite the fact that such values were in fact constructed *against* this event and other imperialist events), cultural productions such as *Hamilton*, even when they code themselves as progressive/transgressive, function to celebrate and valorize the foundational myth of America. Settlerism is such that even progressive language can be used to normalize settler-colonialism. The dominant signifier of US secession incorporates dissent within the project of the colonial nation. The notion that the American War of Independence was a revolution for all people, when in fact it was the establishment of a garrison nation by genociders and slavers, is a core myth for US liberals that is celebrated also by liberal colonial ideologues in Canada and other settler-capitalist formations, all of which have their own liberal colonial myths used to normalize and cleanse their equally horrendous foundation.³⁵

Hamilton demonstrates that discourses of visibility and diversity can function to enshrine settlerism. By re-staging the reactionary foundation of a settler-capitalist formation as one where white supremacists are played by a largely Black cast, by coding colonialism with music and fashion lift-

³⁵ As an aside, there is a curious liberal convention amongst these nation-states when it comes to the matter of genocide. Although most of them have signed onto the UN's Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, they do not see their own colonial pasts as being guilty of the same crime. Rather they treat the Nazi Holocaust (and occasionally the Armenian Genocide) as the paradigm example and thus treat themselves as exempt. They conveniently ignore the fact that, as Césaire noted, "they tolerated [genocide] before it was inflicted on them [meaning Europeans;] they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples" (Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 36). Israel is clearly doing the same, but more directly, when it invokes the memory of the Holocaust as it carries out the multiple ethnic cleansings that comprise the genocide in Gaza. And its settler-capitalist allies are again shutting their eyes and legitimizing it because it is again being "applied only to non-European peoples."

ed from Black American culture, we are asked to imagine this event as universal since it is being told in a “diverse” manner. Again, the notion of “white privilege” does not cut deep enough; it is not able to slice down to the colonial tumor. Recasting a foundational colonial event as one that can be cleansed of its depredations by inviting the colonized to play the agents of this event in fact renders invisible the resistance to the violent and predatory circumstances that generated this colonial mythology, along with the lives and experiences of thousands upon thousands of people who resisted.

My overall point is that settler-colonial social formations generate a particular and powerful ideological apparatus that, like all ruling ideas of the ruling classes, becomes the mirror of values for even those whose people have experienced a history of oppression due to the existence of said social formations. Settlerism is so prevalent as a complex of ideologies that in those nations that retain internal colonies and thus cannot escape a normative racism, its various discourses have become as invisible as the air we breathe. We can thus celebrate the founding events of settler-capitalism divorced from the concrete historical mechanisms of occupation, genocide, slavery, and all of the horrors required to establish nation-states such as the US, Canada, and other remaining settler-capitalisms. *Hamilton* is a paradigm example of how perniciously sublimated settlerism has become: we are exhorted to appreciate an event that was synonymous with genocide and slavery simply because a group of slave-owning rapists are being played by the very people they owned, abused, and slaughtered.

As I have argued elsewhere, remaining settler-colonial social formations propagate a “sublimated colonialism” where the concrete colonial division of colonizer-colonized is obscured behind a curtain that descended when colonies delinked from the motherland. Colonialism is reconceived as something that happened in the past, colonial separatists are sanctified as anti-colonialists, and the ongoing oppression and exploitation of subject peoples are pushed under the surface of social relations.³⁶

In this sense, the garrison has become total and, thus, codes even liberal and progressive norms. While on the surface it seems as if reactionary

³⁶ J. Moufawad-Paul, “Sublimated Colonialism: The Persistence of Actually Existing Settler-Colonialism,” *Philosophy Study* 3:3 (2013), 197.

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white militias and the liberal fans of *Hamilton* are not identical, this is only an epiphenomenal difference. As Fanon has pointed out, liberal

[c]ampaigns of deintoxification [that appeal] to the sense of humanity, to love, to respect for the supreme values [fail to recognize that any country] that lives, draws its substance from the exploitation of other peoples, makes those peoples inferior. Race prejudice applied to those peoples is normal.³⁷

Hence, “[t]he racist in a culture with racism is therefore normal. He has achieved a perfect harmony of economic relations and ideology.”³⁸

There is thus little difference between the liberal who wants to “de-toxify” society by trying to paper over its colonial foundations and treat “racism as a mental quirk”³⁹ and the explicit racist reactionary whose actions are in “harmony” with settler-capitalist social relations. Both are united under the logic of the garrison, though the latter’s behavior is considerably more gauche. Moreover, liberalism has a long history of sanitizing colonialism since it emerged from within the crucible of Empire. Classical liberal philosophers such as Locke and Mill in fact celebrated colonialism, treating it as a civilizing mission. While such a celebration might seem, today, to belong to the speeches of reactionaries, contemporary liberal consciousness happily accepts the narrative of colonialism’s civilizing mission. After all, we are always presented with situations where, when anti-colonial resistance emerges, the colonial “harmony of economic relations and ideology” also emerges and the differences between liberals and reactionaries melt away as the garrison manifests. Again, we are witnessing this in Israeli civil society’s response to the war in Gaza (both liberal and reactionary citizens are blocking food and medical aid from reaching the besieged population), but this is not exclusive to Israeli society. The Kahnesatake resistance to Oka’s incursion in 1990, for example, resulted in an explosion of settler settlement where liberals and reactionaries united in burning Mohawk effigies and throwing rocks at elder and children non-combatants. When the foundation of a

³⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 40–41.

³⁸ Fanon, 40.

³⁹ Fanon, 38.

settler-colonial social formation is inescapable, its central myths—which include the myths of liberalism—become terribly compelling.

“Left-wing” Settlerism

Settlerism thrives in settler-colonial formations because there are material benefits in being a settler. Hence, returning to Sakai’s claim that the fact of colonialism has negatively affected the working class movements in settler-colonial formations, it is important to note that the contradiction between capital and labor that defines capitalism cannot be separated from the contradiction between colonizer and colonized. Working-class struggles against capitalism are often deformed by settlerism:

There is a distinct and exceptional . . . way of life that materially and ideologically fuses together the settler masses—shopkeeper, trade unionist, and school teacher alike. The general command of bourgeois ideology over these settler communities is reinforced by the mobilization of tens of millions [of settlers] into special reactionary organizations. Those . . . who are immigrated or heavily exploited are not only still commanded by loyalty to “their” Empire, but are submerged and disconnected among the far larger, heavily privileged mass of their fellow citizens. These “white poor” are truly lost; the abandoned remnants of the old class struggle existing without direction inside Babylon.⁴⁰

Settlerism, then, is not something that is limited to reactionary trends; it is not simply the result of an ideology aimed at the most socially backwards elements of colonial society. Settlerism is normative in settler-colonial contexts, a ruling idea of the ruling classes that exerts a “material force,” and thus extends its discursive power to would-be progressives. If one is socialized within a settler-colonial social formation—if one grows to political consciousness in a world that is still partially determined by the contradiction between colonizer and colonized—then one must encounter the shibboleth of settler consciousness. That is, it is entirely normative to

⁴⁰ Sakai, 340–341.

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think about the world according to settler-colonial categories if one is born into such a world. Indeed, it is common sense.

Sandy Grande has examined, for example, how Occupy Wall Street's slogan in 2011, "We are the 99%," functioned discursively to reify a settler subjectivity by soliciting the kind of "protestor-subject" that could "legitimate [colonial] business as usual" by obscuring the deeper questions of colonialism and white supremacy behind a monolithic 99%.⁴¹ For within this 99% exists a large portion of the garrison that, despite focusing on the depredations of the ultra-rich 1%, is also composed of the police, military, labor aristocracy, and a whole swathe of people whose positions and livelihood are either dependent on or directly concerned with maintaining settler-capitalism. Since the politics and sensibility of Occupy Wall Street is paradigmatic of the kind of left-wing "movementism" in the imperialist metropolises that became normative at the end of the 1990s, Grande's reading provides a diagnosis of a common trend that is symptomatic among the broad left in settler-capitalist societies.⁴²

Hence, among the anti-capitalist left in settler-capitalist societies, it is quite common to encounter individuals and groups who believe that the self-determination of Indigenous nations either splits the working-class movement (which is abstractly conceived as a united whole rather than something that is already split according to sites of oppression), or is akin to fascist "blood and soil" ideologies. In fact, this "progressive" rejection of national self-determination goes a long way back in the history of communist and socialist movements.⁴³ In 1916, writing against the view that

⁴¹ Grande, 373.

⁴² In my first book, *The Communist Necessity* (2014/2020), I examined the "movementist" phenomenon that reached its apotheosis in Occupy Wall Street and its misleading slogan of "the 99%."

⁴³ Since I am describing a common tendency based on a common subject position, the list of examples of individuals and organizations expressing some form of this type of settlerism is endless. Sakai's *Settlers* attempts to provide a history of the dominant labor movement in the US in which settlerism was expressed and prevented unity, as did Du Bois earlier with *Black Reconstruction*, and perhaps similar historiographies should be written for Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Israel. It is the case, however, that the mainstream communist parties in these countries are all committed to the continuation of these countries as socialist rather than any form of decolonization. The Communist Party of Canada, for example, maintains a notion of a socialist Canada in which rights for Indigenous nations is not self-determination but is instead treated as a problem of civil rights and integration (i.e., a more "left"

the right of self-determination and political secession of oppressed nations would “split” the working-class movement, Lenin argued that “no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations.”⁴⁴ In 1920, during the Second Congress of the Third International, this debate emerged again, and *again* the right of oppressed nations to pursue self-determination was upheld as the correct line. But even still, the French Communist Party refused to recognize the anti-colonial struggles of the nations France had colonized (i.e., its rejection of the Algerian Revolution), leading to its castigation by revolutionaries such as Frantz Fanon, among others. In 1928 in Peru, José Carlos Mariátegui wrote his *Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality* to argue for the self-determination of the Peruvian Indian against the colonial line infecting the movement. In 1971 in Turkey, Ibrahim Kaypakkaya was forced to defend Kurdish national self-determination against the dominant Turkish communist line that chauvinistically refused to recognize a Kurdish nation:

the imperialists’ . . . blatant disregard for [oppressed nations’] right of self-determination will be legitimized by the argument that “they do not constitute a nation.” In the same way, in multinational states, all manner of oppression and tyranny of the dominant nation towards the subject nations is legitimized.⁴⁵

The above examples are iconic but not exhaustive. The point, here, is that the “progressive” left in settler-colonial contexts are often overtaken by the ideology of settlerism—even when their own revolutionary history

version of Canada’s current “reconciliation” discourse that Coulthard and others have thoroughly critiqued). The Democratic Socialists of America have often pointed to “progressive” elements in the American War of Independence and a sense of patriotism with the notion of a more humane US. The list goes on.

⁴⁴ V. I. Lenin, *On the National and Colonial Questions* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), 10.

⁴⁵ Ibrahim Kaypakkaya, *On the National Question* (Paris: Foreign Languages Press, 2020), 24. As an aside, it is worth noting that both Mariátegui and Kaypakkaya were responsible for generating revolutionary struggles in their respective social contexts: Mariátegui’s intervention would lead, four decades later, to the refoundation of the Communist Party of Peru as the “party of Mariátegui,” the so-called Sendero Lumino-so, that would initiate a people’s war in 1980; Kaypakkaya himself founded a revolutionary organization in 1972, the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist, the activities of which led to his capture and execution in 1973.

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has told them that such settlerism should be rejected—because it is materially compelling. No matter how many times revolutionary movements and thinkers have restated the necessity of an anti-colonial ethos, settlerism is such that it deletes and forgets this history. Instead, we find elements of the left in settler-colonial contexts repeating variants of the same chauvinist arguments that were already countered by the revolutionaries mentioned above as well as many others. Moreover, there is the oft-repeated “common sense” adage that peoples, cultures, nations are both created and destroyed throughout the long march of history as a regrettable aspect of human “progress.” Although it is the case that, historically, nations have emerged and have vanished, this *is* is conflated with an ethical *ought* very quickly, and settlerism thrives in the gap between *is* and *ought*. For, if we were to think beyond this truism, we could be led to an ethics beyond settlerism: why should we accept the reality given to us by predatory social relations to date; should we not fight for something better? If these oppressed nations still exist—if they are still struggling for self-determination and if settler-capitalism thrives on their immiseration—then to support their struggles is to oppose settler-capitalism.

In any case, the manifestation of reactionary settlerism is not an aberration. As Fanon reminds us, in settler-colonial contexts, “it is these racists who, in opposition to their country as a whole, are logically consistent.”⁴⁶ The garrison is the default point of reference. To be clear, I am not arguing that everyone with a white settler background is essentially or biologically racist, unable to break from settlerism and white supremacy.⁴⁷ Such a

⁴⁶ Fanon, 40.

⁴⁷ Nor am I arguing that non-white persons cannot be affected by settlerism or, in some cases, even embrace pro-colonial ideology. While in some senses it might make theoretical sense to demarcate arrivants (i.e., refugees, migrants, etc.) from settlers, it is also the case that some of these arrivants may adopt colonial ideology because it is “common sense.” We also know that, historically, members of the colonized have adopted pro-colonial ideology and become collaborators and/or compradors. Moreover, colonialism is such that—while its modern and persistent version has coincided with the construction of race and the valorization of white supremacy—it also possesses a higher level of complexity. We know, for example, that Ireland was colonized by the UK but that Irish immigrants, when moving to the much more vicious settler-colonial formations of the US, Canada, and Australia, were brought into the colonizing fold. We also know that Jewish Europeans were racialized and that this racialization led to the Holocaust, but this does not mean that the establishment of the State of Israel on Palestinian land was not a violent act of sett-

perspective would indeed be similar to what proud racist settlers argue in their appeal to ethno-states and the imagined “inherent” genetic difference between races and cultures. The problem is ideological, not biological. As Marx put it once, “social existence determines [social] consciousness.”⁴⁸

Hence, settlerism is not only an ideology bound to the consciousness of those who occupy, in various degrees, the position of settler in a settler-colonial formation—though such a social consciousness will be logically consistent with their social being, and thus more compelling. Due to the historical process that has enshrined settler-colonial formations as nations, and all of the narratives and mythologies that have become part of the way in which these nations reproduce themselves as nations, settlerism possesses an immanent dimension. If we live in social formations that are settler-capitalist then, just as we need to be aware of how capitalist ideology is compelling to the masses of people who live and toil under capitalism, we need to also be aware of how settlerist ideology is equally as compelling. Just as the average person under capitalism is subjectivized by values that teach them to pursue their liberation through individual competition and private property, so too is the average person within a settler-colonial context taught to pursue their freedom by abiding by the maintenance of colonial power. Simply because an ideology is common sense, however, does not mean it is insurmountable. Under the hegemony of contemporary capitalism it is common sense to believe that there is no alternative to the current state of affairs, that capitalism is “the end of history,” and yet these norms have always been troubled by resistance. Thus, while settler-colonial values, just like bourgeois values, are compelling because they are hegemonic, they can still be rejected as the latter has been rejected by innumerable anti-systemic movements. But those who reject them first, and with the most commitment, will be the exploited and oppressed who have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

ler-colonialism that has generated the same garrison ideology amongst Israeli Jews. But these are larger questions. I am simply interested in the ideology of settlerism that structures subjectivity in settler-colonial formations.

⁴⁸ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1904), 11–12.

Conclusion

When the riots swept across the US in the wake of the execution of George Floyd, the garrison's subsequent manifestation was stark. Not only did the police, as a repressive apparatus of settler-capitalism, reveal themselves to be the professionalized arm of the garrison, but the unity between them and paramilitary settlerist groups and individuals was a reminder of the same unity that defined colonial conquest and slavery. As Patrick Wolfe wrote in *Traces of History*, “settler invasion typically combines a shifting balance of official and unofficial strategies, initially to seize Native territory and subsequently to consolidate its expropriation.”⁴⁹

The reason why the police tolerated armed white militias earlier in the epidemic, and yet cracked down upon protesters angry about the targeting and murder of black persons, became patently evident: these informal militias were friends of the police; there is a circuit of shared membership between them, and thus the official and unofficial wings of the armed garrison could cohere to pacify a recalcitrant population. As statues commemorating slavers and genociders were targeted by the rioters, paramilitary settlerist groups worked with the police to defend these sites, demonstrating that they cared more about inanimate monuments to slavery and colonialism than the contemporary inheritors of these legacies. Meanwhile, liberal politicians and journalists exhorted the rioters to be peaceful, reasserted the old counter-insurgency adage that violent protesters were bad agents and spread rumors about “outside agitators.” There was no meaningful liberal condemnation of the police actions, only the same calls for reform intended to disarticulate and drown out the more radical criticisms of the police (encapsulated in slogans such as “defund,” “abolish,” etc.). Or when they were not drowned out, transformed into toothless academic/cultural terms following a similar fate as “decolonize” and “decolonial”.⁵⁰

In these times, where we can observe the garrison manifesting as armed settlers demanding a return to open white supremacy—and where set-

⁴⁹ Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History* (London: Verso, 2016), 41.

⁵⁰ As Steven Salaita writes about the number of “decolonial” academics who were incapable of speaking against the genocide in Gaza: “Western academe was completely unprepared for the material demands of decolonization despite its popularity as a professional brand. Many among the intellectual class, including scholars of Fanon like Adam Shatz and Lewis Gordon, either disavow or diminish

The Immanent Garrison

Settler-capitalist states sometimes respond in agreement, as Israel is doing with Gaza—the liberal and progressive expressions of settlerism function as seemingly rational alternatives to the supposed irrationality of reactionary and conservative settlerism. We must understand, however, that we are not observing behavior that is deeply irrational (though it may have irrational aspects, such as its denial of history and science) but behavior that is logically entailed by the material processes of settler-capitalism. The liberal and progressive alternatives are merely ways to channel our energy into a variety of different movements that, while decidedly less despicable than movements that are openly racist and/or fascistic, are not interested in breaking from the garrison but re-inscribing a formally kinder and gentler version. After all, liberal responses to all rebellions against the state of affairs treat the demands of the oppressed masses as equally if not more “irrational” than open reactionary predation: how could anyone, liberal ideologues proclaim with shock and horror, believe the capitalist carceral state is unnecessary, that pipelines are a problem, that the boundaries of a *bantustan*⁵¹ should be breached, that settler violence should be confronted with anti-colonial violence? For the settlerist imaginary, a world without the armed manifestation of the garrison is inconceivable. Just as *Hamilton* cleansed a particular settler-colonial history by coding the masters of the garrison and plantation as the victims, thus justifying settler-capitalism as a “progressive” historical inevitability, so too do the liberal and progressive variants of settlerism require that the institutionalized garrison and plantation be accepted as normative—that it can be sanitized and humanized.

Such sanitization and humanization is represented by the Biden campaign and electoral victory. In contradistinction from the irrationality of the white nationalists marching on governmental buildings and denying the pandemic, the settler-capitalist formation of the US now has a government that will return the US to some form of neoliberal business as usual. Indeed, the Democratic Party’s propaganda throughout the 2020 US election was that “Trumpism” was an aberration and that Biden and

anticolonial resistance or ignore it altogether. Academe is where resistance goes for processing and beautification after it has been completed” (stevesalaita.com/scrolling-through-genocide/).

⁵¹ The *bantustans*, or “black homelands,” were those areas in Apartheid South Africa where the Black population was only permitted to live.

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Harris would return the country to “normal.”⁵² As we know, both Biden and Harris had nothing but disdain for the revolts and slogans regarding police and prison abolition put forward by the descendants of the stolen and colonized. Back to normal merely means back to another sublimated form of the garrison; the recent and violent manifestations were not deviations or irrational breaks from this “normal” but logically generated by the social structure. Settler-colonialism will always generate settlerism; the immanent garrison is waiting to violently manifest.

As long as settler-colonial social relations remain in place, no amount of “campaigns of deintoxification” (which is how the Biden-Harris campaign saw themselves vis-à-vis “Trumpism”) will prevent the more reactionary expressions of settlerism from reappearing unless the liberals and progressives are prepared to complete the genocide of the settler-colonial project themselves, since the colonized will always seek to reestablish their national sovereignty as long as they exist as colonized. Indeed, liberal and progressive variants of settlerism have been forced to engage in genocidal programs, regardless of their humanistic principles, when faced with the fact of colonial unrest. Recently, Israel launched a genocidal war upon Gaza, openly proclaiming its desire to cleanse the space of Palestinian life because it understands, due to its closer proximity to its colonial establishment, that the colonized will never stop resisting until they have been ethnically cleansed. Otherwise, in the settler-capitalist formations that have veiled themselves in humanitarian illusions after centuries of their initial conquests, genocidal programs proceed in a different manner. Hence, in Canada, Trudeau Sr.’s “White Paper” that was intended to destroy Indigenous communities by forcing cultural integration in a manner that was similar to the residential schools. Or, also in Canada, the “60s Scoop,” supported by the official social democratic Party (the NDP), where the children of the colonized were removed from Indigenous families and placed

⁵² *On Necrocapitalism*, a collectively written project that began as a serialization during the pandemic and became a book in 2021, states that at the beginning of the 2020 US elections, “[t]he use of Trumpism. . . severs these far-right tendencies from their roots in American history, indeed recent history. . . . Democrats become able to treat the far-right as the fault of the Republicans, rather than as predicated on the conditions of American power that Democratic politicians have for decades tolerated, abetted, or supported” (M. I. Asma, *On Necrocapitalism* (Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2021), 274.).

with settler adoptive/foster families. Genocide is monstrous and even its “kinder and gentler” forms, where outright massacre is replaced with programs designed to culturally kill the native through European “civilizing” measures, should be treated as heinous.

Wolfe has noted that, in contrast to the European colonies in Africa and Asia where native populations were used as a cheap work force, the settler-colonial formations that persist are “not primarily established to extract surplus value from indigenous labour.”⁵³ This is largely because, as I have argued elsewhere (as has Wolfe), the settler-colonial formations that remain have been concerned with replacing the native population, transforming the settlers into the new natives, and merging the motherland with the colony. With the US, Canada, and Australia we witness how colonial relations are pushed under “successive waves of secessionist ideology”⁵⁴ since the advent of these nation-states as nation-states required that the colony become its own motherland with some form of manifest destiny. And since the settler state of Israel emerged after this period, it immediately began with the notion of full conquest and replacement, establishing its own colonial motherland at the outset rather than becoming such a social formation through secession. As Wolfe puts it, such

[s]ettler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies. The split tensing reflects a determinate feature of settler colonization. The colonizers come to stay—invasion is a structure not an event.⁵⁵

Such a structure in the older settler-capitalist formations is the immanentization of the garrison that is no longer surrounded—at least not structurally or ideologically—but it is the content of settlerist epistemology. To know the settler-colonial reality from the viewpoint of the settler is to know it through the lens of the immanent garrison.

Moreover, due to the prevalence of settler-capitalist formations (US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Israel) in the imperialist camp, it is important to understand how their existence influences international rela-

⁵³ Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (London: Cassell, 1999), 1.

⁵⁴ Moufawad-Paul, 202.

⁵⁵ Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 2.

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tions. The shared settler-colonial identity generates a shared international duty: after all, if any of these nation-states were to denounce the colonial violence of another, it would mean that they would also have to denounce their own colonial depredations. Hence, when the ICJ ruled that the South Africa's charge that Israel was guilty of genocide was credible and certain (though weak) provisional measures were ordered (including allowing humanitarian aid to reach the citizens of Gaza), every settler-capitalist formation almost immediately pulled funding from UNRWA following baseless Israeli assertions that some UNRWA employees were involved in the October 7 attacks. Canada and the US were already the most vociferous in providing military funding for Israel's war machine. This is not because the "Israeli lobby" possesses a conspiratorial power to puppet the decisions of these imperialist states, but because there is a shared settler-colonial identity: the Israeli lobby is more like a settler-colonial ambassador to its older colonizer siblings. Why would these settler-capitalist states prevent an ally from doing precisely what they had already done—and what they are still doing—to those Indigenous populations they had conquered, in order to become the imperialist states they currently are?

Beyond this immediate relationship between settler-capitalist formations, is the relationship shared with the majority of the imperialist camp that possesses a settler-colonial past. Most of the Western Europe states gained economic and political power through their colonial adventures and are largely sympathetic with their imperialist cousins who, because of these adventures, remain settler-colonial formations. If we take the colonial genocide in Gaza being a test case, the distance from the days of direct colonialism leads to an uneven sympathy: the UK and Germany are the most vociferous in their support of colonial violence,⁵⁶ with France being a

⁵⁶ While the UK's support possesses clear historical roots in colonial/imperialist internationalism (i.e., the UK eventually helped the Zionist movement establish the modern state of Israel, won over by the arguments of key Zionist ideologues, such as Theodor Herzl, who proposed that Israel would be a bulwark of European colonialism in the Middle East), Germany's unequivocal support appears to possess a different origin. As many German governments and their ideologues have proclaimed, Germany's support of Israel is the result of its supposed shame of its Nazi past and the Holocaust. Thus, its unequivocal support of Israel is treated as some kind of atonement. But this is largely propaganda, though propaganda with a long history, that is belied by a number of historical facts. Most critically, West Germany (which won the Cold War and is thus the precedent of the contemporary Germany nation-state)

little less so (Macron flirted with the “ceasefire” demand), and other states (such as Spain and Belgium) choosing to distance themselves from open colonial attrition. The same thing happened with Apartheid South Africa: the imperialist camp as a whole supported it until it became untenable, the last hold-outs of support being its fellow settler-capitalists.

In the past, anti-systemic movements needed to develop a counterhegemony that would incorporate workers, many of whom were hypnotized by the ideologies produced by bourgeois power. The strength of such movements was the result of an understanding of the gap between what Lenin called “trade union consciousness” and “revolutionary consciousness”;⁵⁷ the trick was to build a movement united in theory and practice that could bridge this gap. But in settler-capitalist contexts, which are determined by colonial ideology as well as capitalist ideology, the gap between settlerism and anti-colonialism needs to be comprehended, rather than downplayed. And, a movement aimed at the annihilation of settler-capitalism rather than the annihilation of the colonized will receive its strength if, and only if, an anti-capitalist movement is also capable of: 1. understanding settlerism and its material basis in the settler-capitalist nation-state; 2. organizing in relationship to the leadership of the most revolutionary factions of the colonized, so as to; 3. develop the means to break from settlerism and pursue an anti-colonial program alongside an anti-capitalist program.

Without comprehending the prevalence of settlerism or developing the means to break from it, all movements in settler-capitalist formations that seek to challenge capitalism will fail, no matter how working-class, feminist, or abstractly anti-racist their points of unity might be. As previously discussed, the composition of the working-class is conditioned by settlerism. Moreover, (settler) women also participated in the settler-colonial project, were part of the original garrisons, and in the US formation where the settler garrison also generated the plantation, settler women profited greatly from slavery as well.⁵⁸ An anti-systemic movement cannot

was never concerned with de-Nazifying, and in fact incorporated numerous high-ranking Nazis into its political apparatus: so much for atonement. These former Nazis had no problem cozying up to Israel alongside the Federal Republic of Germany of the Cold War era due to common imperialist interests.

⁵⁷ From Lenin’s 1902 classic *What Is to Be Done?*

⁵⁸ See, for example, Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers’ masterful historiography *They Were*

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be meaningfully anti-racist in a social context where settler-colonialism thrives, and the ideology that sustains it is left unchallenged, since racism draws its vitality from the persistence of settler-colonial social relations. Racism is not, as aforementioned in regards to Fanon, merely a psychological “quirk,” but in fact draws its vitality from the material facts of settler-colonialism and imperialism.

More importantly, however, is the fact that the struggles of the colonized for self-determination and sovereignty threaten settler-capitalism, since the capitalism in such formations is largely intertwined with settler-colonialism. Decolonization is anathema to the settler-capitalist formation since it threatens to break-up its hegemony. Simultaneously, settler-capitalism is such that a racial hierarchy has been constituted within its working-class. Those workers who have “nothing left to lose but their chains” are largely not the white workers but the masses who are immiserated by settler-colonialism and imperialism: the latter form a potential “hard core” of the proletariat upon which a parasitical settler labor aristocracy draws its sustenance and justifies its “cross class” alliance with the bourgeoisie. As such, this strata constitutes the conscious elements of the “surround” that continues to threaten the immanent garrison, the basis of a subject that can truly threaten the settler-capitalist state of affairs.

Her Property (2019) that examines, in great detail, the ways in which settler women in the US were able to establish a predatory economic and social empowerment during the plantation era.

Position of Innocence: Initial Thoughts on Settler Ideology and Victimhood in Canada

Alexandra Lepine

In the days since October 7th 2023, social media and all manner of news outlets have been flooded with images of death and tragedy in Gaza, but among the cacophony of suffering there has emerged a narrative of settler victimhood. While this narrative is especially fraught within the context of Israeli settlerism because of the specific ways in which the genuine oppression of the Jewish people and the Holocaust has been leveraged as proof of the impossibility of Israeli violence against Palestinians, this is by no means unique to Israeli settlerism. Settler victimhood has been mobilized within the past months (and decades) to whitewash the genocide being waged against Palestinians and transmute Palestinian self-defense into terrorist aggression, just as settler victimhood has been mobilized in North America against First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people for hundreds of years. It is essential that we understand what is happening to Palestinians as a settler-colonial project, not unlike the settler-colonies who daily arm and fund the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Canada is one such settler project, and the similarities between Canada and Israel's performances of settler victimhood has not been lost on Indigenous people in Canada, who

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recognize themselves in the Palestinian people daily fighting for their lives, land, and liberation.

Furthermore, Canada's Indian Act and its treatment of Indigenous people has been used as a template for settler-colonialism around the world. Its colonial policy was reported as an inspiration to Israeli settlement in Palestine¹, and its reserve system has long been considered the blueprint for South African apartheid. Thus, Canadian settler-colonialism should be studied by anyone wishing to understand how settler-colonialism functions. Perhaps more importantly still, those of us who organize for a future beyond settler-capitalism here in Canada need to reinvigorate the tradition of material investigation. The situation continues to evolve, and our understanding of colonialism must evolve with it if we are to have a hope for the freedom of all Indigenous Peoples of the world. Those of us organizing in the imperial core, regardless of our social position or the axes of oppression we occupy, can best serve the global movement by rooting out settlerism and capitalism at home and embracing a materialist position. As such, this article is an attempt to draw preliminary conclusions about victimhood as an ideological feature of settler-colonialism and examine some of the symptoms of this feature—namely the rhetorical variant of victimhood that settlers use to avoid the reality of colonialism and obscure the path to liberation. This article considers examples of settler victimhood from recent events such as Trumpism, the Freedom Convoy, residential school denialism, and the curious phenomena of “Pretendianism,” in an attempt to disambiguate one of the ideological struggles our movements are faced with at this moment.

One begins, as ever, when considering questions of colonialism, with Fanon:

Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring people in its net, or of draining the colonized brain of any form or substance. With a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the col-

¹ Mike Krebs, “Architect of apartheid: Canada’s support for Israel has taken many forms, but perhaps its greatest gift has been its example,” *Briarpatch Magazine*, May 1, 2020, <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/architect-of-apartheid.;> Brandi Morin, “Canada and the First Nations: A history of broken promises,” *Aljazeera*, March 17, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/3/17/canada-and-the-first-nations-a-history-of-broken-promises.>

onized people and distorts it, disfigures it, destroys it. This effort to demean history prior to colonization today takes on a dialectical significance.²

Colonialism in Canada continues to function in this way. Settlers confronted with the actions of their ancestors attempt to temporally distance themselves from the events of colonization and render them equal to any inequalities present in traditional Indigenous societies: “Well, Native Americans kept slaves too,” or “Europeans learned scalping from Indigenous people.” The relative truth or untruth of these claims is irrelevant because they do not represent present, or even recent, manifestations of power. When this false equivalency is defeated, the settler inevitably falls back on the typical Hail Mary of “Well, we conquered North America fair and square; you people need to get over it.” In a split second the position of the settler changes from an attempt to establish innocence to that of a victor, a rhetorical move only possible when one already occupies a position of relative power. In perhaps even more insidious instances, there is a further attempt to establish settler innocence by posing oneself and one’s ancestors as innocent bystanders or even as victims of the Canadian government themselves. In both instances the action of colonization is located in the past, safely out of sight, in attempt to assuage settler guilt and comfort the settler psyche. As Tyler A. Shipley argues in his political history, *Canada and the World*:

Canadians today like to imagine that this country has moved beyond the racism of the past, but this is largely a myth sustained by the self-delusion of settlers who cannot bear the consequences of admitting Canadians came here as conquerors. The evidence that Canada remains a segregated society founded upon conquest is everywhere around us, if we only choose to look. Just as they once claimed Indigenous Peoples to be “savages” who “would scalp you as soon as look at you,” modern settlers peddle myths that bear equally little resemblance to the truth: They don’t pay taxes. They only get jobs because of affirmative action. All they do is

² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 149.

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whine about the past. These misleading platitudes are shared and affirmed at every level of Canadian settler society.³

When settlers are confronted with the reality that Canada remains a colonial project and that they themselves benefit from this project there is an ideological instinct to deny and deflect.

The specific iteration of settler victimhood with which we are currently faced, and which at its root is an ideological attempt to deny culpability for past wrongs, is in part a reaction against attempts at decolonization; more importantly we can understand it as emerging from the cleavage of Canada's colonial ideology from its curated image as a multicultural nation state. By this I mean that the colonial government granting special rights and concessions to its internal colonies—in Canada this takes many forms, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)⁴—appears to the settler as an act of dispossession. Not necessarily because the settler is themselves a direct beneficiary of colonialism in the same way an early settler granted a homestead would be, but because the settler-colonial ideology that permeates all of Canadian society hinges on the idea that settlers deserve their current position in our social formation—or at the very least shouldn't be blamed for it, as they did not benefit as much as those oth-

³ Tyler A. Shipley, *Canada and the World: Settler Capitalism and the Colonial Imagination* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2020), 90.

⁴ The TRC "was created through a legal settlement between Residential Schools Survivors, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit representatives, and the parties responsible for creation and operation of the schools: the federal government and the church bodies." The TRC's mandate "was to inform all Canadians about what happened in residential schools. The TRC documented the truth of Survivors, their families, communities, and anyone personally affected by the residential school experience. This included First Nations, Inuit, and Métis former residential school students, their families, communities, the churches, former school employees, government officials and other Canadians." "Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, University of Manitoba, March 15, 2024, <https://nctr.ca/about/history-of-the-trc/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-of-canada/>. The TRC's final report was published in 2015 and has been the subject of heated debate since then, with many Indigenous people feeling it does not go far enough and many settlers rejecting its content as inaccurate.

In a 2019 opinion piece for the *National Post*, Conrad Black, a central figure in conservative Canadian media, called the report "shocking and dangerous." Conrad Black, "Conrad Black: The truth about truth and reconciliation," *National Post*, March 20, 2021, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/conrad-black-7>.

er settlers who are long dead, or those British or those Americans.⁵ The recent turn by settler-capitalist nations towards “inclusion,” is as much an attempt to retain this position of innocence as it is to address the deep disparities that exist between Indigenous people and settlers. One example of this turn towards inclusion that maintains colonial power structures would be the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which Canada reluctantly signed in 2021.⁶ Although UNDRIP claims that “nothing in this Declaration may be used to deny any peoples their right to self-determination, exercised in conformity with international law,” and acknowledges the right of self-determination, Canada’s sole focus has been “renewing the Government of Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples” and the self-determination in question has been restricted to consultation on issues which would directly impact Indigenous people and the elimination of racism and discrimination on the basis of being Indigenous.⁷ The government of Canada’s definition of self-determination does not include the offer of secession, meaning that while Indigenous nations have a say over their legal status in Canada, they do not have a say over their statehood or sovereignty. The Canadian state is unwilling and incapable of fully doing away with colonialism, and so it seeks to reduce the outward appearance of its nature through the deployment of vulgar identity politics and toothless rights discourse, presenting itself as the sole source of empowerment for oppressed groups.

It is clear why settlers would gravitate to a position of innocence to avoid having to deal with the issues of the past: this position allows settler states to continue with settler-colonial policy while distancing themselves from an overtly genocidal version of colonialism through acts of reconciliation, eliminating the legal and political category of Indigenous, and rationaliz-

⁵ For further reading on the topic of legitimizing settler colonialism: Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 36, 105-106.

⁶ Department of Justice, *Backgrounder: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, December 10, 2021, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/about-apropos.html#shr-pg0>

⁷ UN General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/61/295*, October 2, 2007, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unga/2007/en/49353>, March 13, 2024; Department of Justice, *Backgrounder*.

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ing the continuation of the settler nation in place of an “eliminated” Indigenous population.⁸ But how does a position of victimhood emerge from a “supremacist” ideology? Meredith and Ryan Neville-Shepherd offer us an entry point into this puzzling rhetorical shift. They recall the 2019 viral video in which Omaha Elder Nathan Phillips was blocked and surrounded by MAGA teenagers on the steps the Lincoln Memorial near the end of the Indigenous Peoples’ March.⁹ In this video Phillips faces off with one teen wearing a MAGA hat (Nick Sandmann), while others chanted and even performed the infamous “Tomahawk Chop.”¹⁰ This event demonstrates how victimhood is rendered inaccessible to true victims of the settler-capitalist state and its cultural hegemony. Phillips suffered additional public backlash after the story hit major news outlets, proving that his “victimhood” as a Native man and long-time activist, nor even his status as a veteran, afforded him any true privileges in the face of systemic racism and colonialism. Allegedly, the young white Trump supporters fell victim to the court of public opinion as well. Nick Sandmann, the MAGA teen smirking jubilantly in the infamous picture that began circulating social media after the event, argued that the backlash he received was unjustified. And after additional video footage emerged showing Phillips had initially approached the teens himself, Sandmann successfully sued several major news outlets for defamation, stating at the Republican National Convention that he was the victim of a liberal culture war that was “anti-Christian, anti-conservative, [and] anti-Donald Trump.”¹¹ At the end of the day both

⁸ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” *Journal of Genocidal Research*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2006): 141.

⁹ Neville-Shepard, Meredith and Ryan Neville-Shepard, “Outfitting the Conservative Civil Rights Movement: Rehearsed White Victimhood and the MAGA Hat,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 25 no. 4 (2022): 35–63.

¹⁰ The “Tomahawk Chop” is a sports celebration associated with many sports teams in the US, including the Washington Commanders, which previous to 2019 were the Washington “Redskins,” a name widely acknowledged as racist and anti-Indigenous. Craig Melvin, “The Tomahawk chop and other reasons why the incident at Lincoln Memorial is offensive,” MSNBC, January 21, 2019, video, 1:48, <https://www.msnbc.com/craig-melvin/watch/the-tomahawk-chop-and-other-reasons-why-the-incident-at-lincoln-memorial-is-offensive-1429428291889>.

¹¹ Neville-Shepard, Meredith and Ryan Neville-Shepard. “Outfitting the Conservative Civil Rights Movement: Rehearsed White Victimhood and the MAGA Hat.” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 25, no. 4 (2022), 35–63.

Phillips and Sandmann were vilified by sections of the public, but Sandmann faced no real consequences; hell, he even got paid! The fact of the matter is that no matter what Phillips' story is, or how much suffering he has experienced in his life at the hands of settler-capitalism, it would not measure up to the cultivated illusion of white victimhood.

The Neville-Shepherd article understands Sandmann's victimhood as an example of rehearsed victimhood: "a performance of vulnerability that allows those in historically powerful positions to claim victim status by manifesting material evidence of their subjugation."¹² Distinguished from therapeutic victimhood, which emphasizes the individual experience of suffering, and material victimhood which is, as Bryan McCann argues, "grounded in political, historical, and economic contextualization," rehearsed victimhood is an attempt to render the imagined oppression of white settlers material.¹³ In happening upon the "evidence" that Phillips approached him first, Sandmann seemingly manifested material proof that he was not the aggressor, and therefore could be nothing other than a victim. We are now living in an era in which fascists and conservatives are so emboldened, that the threat of public backlash is worn like a badge of honour and mobilized as "self-fulfilling evidence for their claim to marginalized status."¹⁴

While certainly rehearsed victimhood is a defining feature of the current right-wing movement, it is not a new phenomenon. The actions of Indigenous people in the course of anti-colonial resistance are always used as an ideological justification for the disproportionate retaliation of the occupying force. Shipley offers up the example of the so-called Frog Lake Massacre in which a group of Cree killed nine European settlers in 1885.¹⁵ Never mind that the Cree had legitimate grievances with the Department of Indian Affairs agents and their running dogs which made up the death toll, or that their people had been intentionally starved by those same

¹² Neville-Shepard, 39.

¹³ Neville-Shepard, 39-40, quoted from Bryan J. McCann (2007), *Therapeutic and Material <Victim> hood: Ideology and the Struggle for Meaning in the Illinois Death Penalty Controversy, Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 4:4, 382-401, DOI: 10.1080/14791420701632931

¹⁴ "Outfitting the Conservative Civil Rights Movement," 39.

¹⁵ Shipley, 66-67.

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colonial administrators—never mind that the Cree had spared three other settlers in the course of this “massacre”—the response by the Canadian government was overwhelming force, justified in the eyes of the settler public as self-defense. The Cree were hunted down, subjected to a show trial, and hanged as a public spectacle.¹⁶ Today we see this same denial of settler responsibility, and the demonization of Indigenous self-defense. Blockades, like the one erected by the Wet’suwet’en to oppose the Coastal GasLink pipeline, are portrayed as unreasonable or illogical; land defenders are harassed by the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police)—it’s the same story.¹⁷ Indigenous people have the temerity to defend themselves and the land, and the colonial state turns their defense into an unprovoked act, which in turn justifies any further violence on the part of the settler state. We also see the same pattern in residential school denialism which attempts to convince settlers that they are being scapegoated for the crimes of a long-dead colonial force, that residential schools were merely the cost of civilization, or worse that the investigation into graves on residential school grounds might be “fake news.”¹⁸ This is of course the product of settler ideology, which takes white victimhood as implicit and denies the legitimacy of any political structures that are not subsumable by the state.

One would hope that in the decades that followed Canadian Confederation, the economic oppression experienced by the settler working class at the hands of the colonial state would have emboldened proletarians against the settler project, but historically this has not been the case. Large sections of the settler proletariat embraced colonial ideology, believing that they were deserving of the land as compensation for their service as colonial agents. Again, Shipley offers us a succinct explanation of this:

These promises were typically illusory. John A. Macdonald and I. G. Baker didn’t want to share their wealth with glorified peasants,

¹⁶ Shipley, 67.

¹⁷ Blockades are a widely used tactic in Indigenous activism in Canada, both as an act of asserting sovereignty and protest. More information on Wet’suwet’en can be found here: “Criminalization of Wet’suwet’en Land Defenders,” Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/criminalization-wetsuweten-land-defenders/>.

¹⁸ Niigan Sinclair and Sean Carleton, “Residential School Denialism Is on the Rise,” *The Tyee*, June 20, 2023, <https://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2023/06/20/Residential-School-Denialism-On-Rise/>.

even if they had English names. The horizon of settler capitalism was a highly stratified society where the majority worked hard and earned little, in order to sustain the enormous profits of the few. But in the establishment of that system, it needed a settler vanguard convinced that they would be the winners and that the only thing preventing them from realising their dreams was the presence of Indigenous people. Thus, in periods of Indigenous resistance, the elite needed to keep settlers on their side or face outright catastrophe.¹⁹

The specter of the warlike and resentful Native and the rebellious and criminally minded Métis was continually evoked to keep white settlers anxious, particularly those who were already living precarious lives at the fringes of Canada's settler-capitalist economy. As Canada consolidated itself as a nation, settler subjectivity was also consolidated, and Indigenous people were rendered subjects of the Canadian state. As Indigenous people were killed en masse—confined to reserves and residential schools and assimilated into the Canadian nation—the necessity of cultivating an overtly violent settler subjectivity dwindled, and settler-capitalist ideology began to reproduce itself, primarily via social institutions. While the daily disenfranchisement, violence, and racism did not cease, settlers (particularly in the long-settled urban centres) began to slip into a collective denial about how colonization had unfolded in Canada. They pretended they did not know how the Black and Indigenous slaves in the town homes of Montreal and Toronto had arrived there or convinced themselves this enslavement was the normal order of things because the colonial project had won, and the Indigenous polity no longer existed. They thought of reserves as far off impoverished places and tourist traps, and all the while school children and new immigrants were fed the myth that the “Indian” had all but disappeared and left the land to be inherited by deserving settler caretakers.

Even the radical left for a time was influenced by this powerful mythology. In 1925, the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) initiated a campaign for “Canadian Independence,” which openly attacked the British North America Act (BNA).²⁰ While the CPC was certainly aware of In-

¹⁹ Shipley, 69.

²⁰ Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada*

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Indigenous struggles, there is little evidence to suggest that they considered Indigenous people an oppressed group separate from the settler proletariat or that they acknowledged Indigenous movements for self-determination or even considered that before colonization “Canada” was comprised by many Indigenous nations. The campaign made no mention of Indigenous liberation and was solely focused on liberating the settler proletariat from its colonial leadership.²¹ Three years prior, Chief Deskaheh of the Six Nations of the Grand River made an appeal to the League of Nations, asking them to recognize the sovereignty of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and his appeal was backed by the newly appointed delegate from the Irish Free State (though he was not allowed to vote in favor).²² How is it possible that the CPC was unaware of this? How is it possible that, as Marxists, their investigation into Canadian society did not reveal the contours of settler-colonialism? Without dwelling too much on this topic we can say that, at the very least, the methods of investigation employed by the CPC were insufficient and that settler ideology was so pervasive that even progressive settlers were unable to come to terms with their position as beneficiaries of colonialism. While the CPC was certainly campaigning against real economic suffering when they challenged the BNA, their inability to overcome settlerism on the ideological level kept them from having a complete materialist analysis of Canada and cut them off from the possibility of a united front between the settler proletariat and the oppressed Indigenous nations of Canada.

At this juncture we may be reminded of Fanon’s caution in *Black Skin, White Masks* that “[a] white man in the colonies has never felt inferior in any respect whatsoever.”²³ While this is true on the basis on racial and colonial hierarchy, we are left to wonder then how white victimhood has become so pervasive. However, this victim mentality is not based on the idea that the colonizer is inferior—quite the opposite. In rendering himself a victim, the colonizer attempts to occupy a space of moral superiority in order to nullify any accusations from the colonized. He claims colo-

(Bloomington: Trafford Publishing, 2006), 167.

²¹ Tim Buck, “Canada and the British Empire,” March 21, 1925, *The Worker*.

²² “Six Nations appeals to the League of Nations, 1922–31,” *History Beyond Borders*, May 26, 2020, <https://historybeyondborders.ca/?p=189>.

²³ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 73.

nization had good intentions, denies personal involvement, and decries his own oppression at the hands of his nation as a proletarian. The colonizer may even, and we shall expand more on this shortly, attempt to understand himself as colonized. This is a type of victimhood, specific to settler-colonialism, and which hinges on the pseudo-proletarian populism of the Fascist movement. Ignoring the benefits of colonialism, the settler imagines his oppression as a proletarian—and ignoring the complicated categories of labor aristocrat and petty bourgeois which may define his economic role—to be equal to or greater than that of the colonized person. He claims the resentment that colonized peoples feel towards him as a settler is unfounded. He imagines himself a martyr—occupying a position of moral and social superiority, fetishizing himself as a subject of colonization—and in doing so, polluting a potential wellspring of the anticolonial movement. He internalizes the colonial propaganda which claims the “special rights” of the colonized nation are equal or greater to the rights of the settler proletarian.

Here, it is necessary that we distinguish settlers from those who have taken up the cause of settler-colonialism. There are of course many settlers who, despite benefiting from the settler-colonial system, do not operate on the ideological basis of being settlers. Furthermore, there are those living in Canada who do not fit the term settler comfortably either due to their status as refugees, migrants, and/or immigrants who have been forced into settler-colonial patterns. I am in no way claiming that a settler cannot experience economic oppression or a myriad of other oppressions, but any reasonable revolutionary understands that there is a material basis for Indigenous people and settler proletarians to organize together; our liberation is one and the same. As such, my use of the term “settler” should be taken contextually: I mean those who have internalized their role as settler.

Just as the settler takes on the guise of victim, so does the bourgeois adopt the guise of the proletarian. The bourgeois imagines himself as a hard-working proletarian both because he fetishizes labor and because he wants to ease his conscience. Both moves to innocence/victimhood rely on the reversal of the subject position between oppressor and oppressed. Again, this is an easily observable trend in the populist pseudo-blue collar politics of the far right. The Freedom Convoy is a pertinent example of a movement that presented itself as a working-class movement with the

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goal of securing rights for an oppressed group. A major claim by many of the “protestors” was that the vaccine mandate was preventing them from being able to work and that their personal freedom to choose not to be vaccinated was being infringed upon. The reality is that this was not a working-class protest—most of the protestors not even being proletarian truckers themselves—but was a protest in service of far right ideals. But this idea that the protestors were proletarians being targeted by the Trudeau government was an effective means of stirring up dissent and division. Many critics have compared the Freedom Convoy to Michael Kimmel’s concept of “aggrieved entitlement”—a perception that the benefits and/or status you believe yourself entitled to have been wrongfully taken away from you by unforeseen forces.²⁴ The settler’s victimhood is rooted in aggrieved entitlement. Settlers feel entitled to continue reaping colonial benefits, and those who have internalized their role as an occupying force are threatened by the idea that what they are entitled to may never come—or worse, may be given to groups deemed less-than by their ideology. The Freedom Convoy participants, lacking a material understanding of Canadian settler-capitalism and their role within it, blamed their woes on Trudeau, immigrants, and the progressive movement at large, seeking any possible route to victimhood.

Victimhood being deployed as a counter-tactic to progressive identity politics is so deeply and ironically North American that Mark Twain must have written this timeline himself. Not only does the far right fundamentally misunderstand identity politics, their performance of victimhood is not based on material oppression but in an imagined precarity that is really just equality at the bottom of the capitalist system. The cooptation of victimhood eases any psychological discomfort settlers have to reckon with when gaining consciousness, but it does so at the expense of the truly oppressed.²⁵ A 2018 survey from the Angus Reid Institute revealed that:

Fully 53 per cent [of Canadians] surveyed said the country spends too much time apologizing for residential schools and it’s time

²⁴ Conroy, J. Olive, “‘Angry white men’: the sociologist who studied Trump’s base before Trump,” *The Guardian*, February 27, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/27/michael-kimmel-masculinity-far-right-angry-white-men>.

²⁵ Michelle Cyca, “The Dangerous Allure of Residential School Denialism,” *The Walrus*, January 8, 2024, <https://thewalrus.ca/residential-school-denialism/>.

to move on (compared to 47 per cent who believe harm done by the schools continues and cannot be ignored); more than half of respondents said Indigenous people should have no special status that other Canadians don't; the same proportion said Indigenous peoples would be better off if they integrated more into broader Canadian society, even if the cost is losing more of their traditions and culture.²⁶

In reality, the "special status" Indigenous people in Canada have does not make up for the economic and social disparities that exist between them and settlers. The incoherence of this position matters not, because any attempt to demonstrate that settler oppression does not exist, or is based in some other mechanism like class, is met with aggressive denial that mirrors how conservatives and fascists fear identity politics will be used against them. But this understanding of identity politics is completely untethered from any material conditions of oppression, and lives entirely in the ideological realm. This postmodern leap away from materialism is embraced by reactionaries and the liberal bourgeoisie alike, because they cannot win on the battlefield of materialism. History is not on their side.

Fanon points out that the colonist/settler will often argue that colonialism was for the good of the colonized or benefitted them in some way; we have already mentioned this, but it is necessary to return briefly to this notion.²⁷ It is becoming increasingly difficult for settlers to make this claim in the face of overwhelming historical evidence of colonization and ongoing settler colonial violence. While reactionaries still try to make this point, even going as far as denying genocide and quibble over which acts of colonialism fit this definition, large sections of the colonial state apparatus are turning towards a different version of settler colonialism.²⁸ No longer able to deny the wrongs of the past or point to advantages in

²⁶ Aaron Hutchins, "On First Nations issues, there's a giant gap between Trudeau's Rhetoric and what Canadians really think: exclusive poll," *Maclean's*, June 7, 2018, <https://macleans.ca/news/canada/on-first-nations-issues-theres-a-giant-gap-between-trudeaus-rhetoric-and-what-canadians-really-think/>.

²⁷ Fanon, 149.

²⁸ The Canadian Press, "'Genocide' isn't the right word to describe what's been done to Indigenous women and girls: Andrew Scheer," *The National Post*, June 10, 2019, <https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/canadas-treatment-of-indigenous-women-not-a-genocide-andrew-scheer>.

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the present, the liberal bourgeoisie, sets out to subsume indigeneity and present the nation as tolerant of Indigenous self-determination. Many settlers are perfectly comfortable with this, and it does not antagonize their worldview because it does nothing to alter the core material conditions of settler-colonialism. However, the settlers who remain entrenched in settler colonial ideology are left with two paths of psychological recourse to cope with this ideological shift: continue to deny the past or become Indigenous themselves.

There has been an incredible amount of overlap between the Freedom Convoy and residential school denialism. This makes perfect sense as both are connected to far right movements and parties like the People's Party of Canada that, in addition to being settlerist movements, have an economic stake in continuing to keep Canada capitalist and dependent on extractive industries—a major front of ongoing colonialism in Canada. However, victimhood has not only been deployed by these movements to coopt working class symbolism and to reinforce white supremacist power structures, but it has also been used to attempt to “indigenize” far right ideas. Bound up in the notion that settlers are deserving of the land is the homestead principle—the idea that working land that was not being “actively used” renders it the property of the person who does the work.²⁹ In a bizarre attempt to further cement their claim to land, settlers have attempted to claim Indigenous status. The right reinterprets the Indigenous connection to land as an extension of the homestead principle; this reinforces the aforementioned moral and social high ground and opens the possibility of the settler becoming Indigenous himself. If the settler is Indigenous, he is able to further marginalize the immigrant on the basis of his “identity” as Indigenous, and he shields himself from being “marginalized” through the process of decolonization.

Pretendianism, as it is widely known now, is the result of these ideological features of settler colonialism. By clinging to a past relative who may have been Indigenous or fabricating one entirely, the settler is able to relieve some of the guilt they hold about benefitting from colonization or deny those benefits entirely.³⁰ It is an attempt of the settler to regain

²⁹ John Locke, “Two Treatises of Government (1823),” March 15, 2024, <https://www.yorku.ca/comninel/courses/3025pdf/Locke.pdf>.

³⁰ Jean Teillet, “Indigenization: How Genealogy and DNA Justify Race Shifting in Eas-

humanity lost through the perpetuation of colonialism. There are of course many people in Canada who have mixed blood or who occupy odd positions within the Canadian social formation. (I myself am one such person, being of both Métis and settler heritage.) However, there is a vast difference between understanding that your family history and identity is complex and claiming to belong wholly and presently to an oppressed nation. Pretendianism is defined, not just by the exaggeration or fabrication of Indigenous heritage, but by the opportunistic deployment of that identity in disconnection from the political and social life of an Indigenous nation. When I speak of pretendianism, here, I am not talking about non-status, mixed-race, or reconnecting Indigenous people, as they have a material claim of varying degrees, to the experience of colonial oppression. However, I would urge anyone in one of those positions, as I do myself daily, to consider how you can organize to serve your people and their eventual liberation—consider how your complicated identity is being used now as a means of reinforcing the myth of the post-colonial and multicultural Canadian state. And further, to consider what comes after our liberation from settler capitalism and what kind of political subjectivity best serves that future or may emerge because of it.

During the Freedom Convoy, many right-wing organizations and people opportunistically used Every Child Matters banners and orange shirts to draw people into the argument that the government was forcing children to get vaccinated.³¹ They used the horror of residential schooling to fear monger and associate their movement with genuine victimhood. Freedom Convoy leader Pat King, for example, contributed to this narrative heavily and even claimed Indigenous status himself.³² While this seems like a counterintuitive move for a fascist movement to make, it unfortunately is not: the fascist, the patriot, the settler all identify with the nation, and the settler-colonial nation's ultimate goal is to eliminate, by genocide

tern Canada," *Canadian Issues* (Spring 2020), 40–43.

³¹ Orange shirts were adopted as the symbol of residential school survivors, later the campaign also adopted the slogan "Every Child Matters." John Boyko, "Orange Shirt Day," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, September 28, 2021, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/orange-shirt-day>.

³² Max Lamoureaux and Anya Zoledziowski, "An Anti-Vax Conspiracy Theory Video Went Viral. An Indigenous Community Paid the Price," *Vice*, October 20, 2021, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/akvwep/conspiracy-black-lake-pat-king>.

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or assimilation, the Indigenous people and their identity.³³ Pretendianism is another attempt to subsume the political and cultural identity of Indigenous people and nations. Furthermore, it is an attempt to fix the Indigenous subject in a state of victimhood, which can then be leveraged more readily by those who already occupy positions of power within settler-colonialism.

But victimhood and moral martyrdom are not our goals. The right believes victimhood is the radical left's source of ideological power and so attempts to outmaneuver us on the basis of ideology. However, our goal is the liberation of all peoples from economic and social oppression. This goal will not be realized on the basis of ideology alone. This historic task necessitates that we understand our material conditions as thoroughly as possible, including the sources and characteristics of oppression on the basis of identity. We should not endeavor to make these categories of identity transhistorical, but to understand them, as we do class, as the outgrowth of features of our current epoch which must be smashed. It feels impossible right now to escape the petulant screams of settlers and fascists, lamenting the shift that is occurring in human consciousness, but this is all the more reason we need to get organized. The settler proletariat has a vested interest in the destruction of the settler capitalist state, but this destruction is impossible without large-scale collaboration between the proletarian movement and the Indigenous movement in these settler capitalist formations. Indigenous people do not stand in the way of settler proletarian liberation; "Land Back" is not a threat but a revolutionary promise. It is only the internalized white supremacy of the settler proletarian, which tells him his exploitation is at the hands of Indigenous people and not the settler bourgeoisie, that stands in the way of cooperation between these movements.

³³ Wolfe, 141.

Kızılırmak¹

Hasan Hüseyin Korkmazgil

¹ Translation, as it appears in a yet unpublished text, *The Struggle for a New Human Being*, by Aytay Ünsalm.

One day they came out—
their meaningless faces and smiles—
consumption production and old underpants—
they brought their chewing gum and left it—
their tics, their facial expressions, their shouts—
they brought and left the dreams of young girls—
every day they brought it back and left it—
their ropes, their fishing rods and cans—
milk powders, soy, Salem cigarettes—
contraception pills, medals, collars—
flags, tears, curses—
our mother, our sister, our child—
the most what we care so much about—
using the organs of production and the waste of consumption—
is that courtesy of God and Jesus and ours—
horses, stables—
razors and teeth they brought and left—
every day they brought and left again every day—
then beautiful, beautiful agreements—
then beautiful, beautiful contracts—
then they share it beautifully—
hanged by your permission—
and non-stop Balthasar feasts—

after that beautiful, beautiful fighter jets—
radars, launchers, atomic bombs—
submarine something above the sea—
subconscious, unconscious everything—
flea markets—
heroin they brought their cocaine and left it—
they brought it back every day
they left—
and then they didn't retreat to their ships
and then they didn't retreat to their ships
and then they didn't retreat to their ships
and now they've brought so much.
and now they've brought so much.
and now they've brought so much.
there is no place for independence in my country.

About this issue's art. . .

The art in this issue of *Material* was donated by Gaza-born Palestinian artist Taysir Batniji. These first four images are from his 2001 project *Gaza Walls*. "A kind of collectively assembled collage in a state of simultaneous creation and decay, the walls speak to the state of [Gazan] neighborhoods in political and existential crisis, obliquely recording the deaths and absences that are an ongoing aspect of everyday life in Palestine. Moral posters, portraits of martyrs, political graffiti—some elements hidden or worn away or torn—form multiple layers. . . . The images in *Gaza Walls*, coded for local inhabitants, convey the complexity and opacity of a place that, for decades, has been subject, in turn, to international indifference and scrutiny." [Vicky Moufawad-Paul, "On a Delicate Difficult Path: The Work of Taysir Batniji," *Prefix Photo 20*, no. 39 (May 2019), 34-35.] These images, along with the photographs from his 2013 project *Interface*—which are of the quotidian ways in which colonial occupation claims space—are all the more meaningful now, likely lost with much of Gaza, with the mixture of indifference to the ongoing genocide and the scrutiny of Palestinian existence.









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“An Incurable Disease Called Hope”: an Interview with Abdaljawad Omar

The following discussion with Abdaljawad Omar was conducted over the month of March 2024 by email. Abdaljawad Omar is a scholar in the West Bank, a doctoral candidate, and part-time lecturer at Birzeit University. He has published numerous articles and essays about the Palestinian struggle for self-determination (some of which are referenced below), as well as interviews for podcasts such as *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism*. Although Abdaljawad had initially hoped to write an essay for this issue of *Material*, the dire situation in Palestine was not conducive to the deadline. Instead, he graciously agreed to engage in a discussion/interview about the current conjuncture in Palestine. This discussion represents both a snapshot of where things were at in the struggle for Palestinian self-determination in March and an analysis of structures, formations, and strategy that has wider reaching implications.

Material: Although we want to examine broader issues regarding strategy and resistance in this discussion, we would be remiss if we did not begin by discussing the current conjuncture of Palestinian resistance and the social context in which you think and live. At the moment of this interview it is now five months into Israel’s current genocidal offensive in Gaza. As more weeks since October 7 2023 accumulate, so does the wreckage of bodies

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and civil infrastructure. It has reached the point where the IOF can target hospitals and food trucks, can carry out multiple massacres a day, and the most powerful states in the world can just shrug it off and allow what even their liberal human rights discourses would condemn become normal. Steven Salaita, among others, noted that it was once presumed Israel would continue, post-Nakba, with more covert forms of removal and ethnic cleansing under the legal mechanisms of apartheid (mechanisms such as policies of debilitation as examined in Jasbir Puar's *The Right to Maim*¹) with the occasional short-term military operation. What has been happening since October, though, resembles the kind of settler-colonial war of conquest and clearing that was supposed to belong to the past. As you noted in your interview with Louis Allday for *Ebb Magazine* five weeks into this war, "if Israel finds enough international willingness to turn a blind eye it will attempt to commit in this century another Nakba."² It has now been five months, and your assessment is sadly proving to be prescient.

Although you live in the West Bank, settler violence has become more belligerent since October, as has the larger imperialist push to build more settlements and recruit more settlers to the colonial vision of *Eretz Israel*.³ Indeed, a few days before beginning this discussion, Zionist organizations in Toronto were hosting a real-estate event to sell Palestinian land to Canadian would-be settlers. Can you comment on this conjuncture, on how you see the characteristics of this war within the broader context of colonial counter-insurgency, and the impact the genocidal devastation in Gaza has had on life in the West Bank?

Abdaljawad Omar: There are several issues here to disentangle. The first is whether Israel's war on Gaza fits within the counterinsurgency framework, particularly from an American perspective, where the separation of insurgents from civilians underpins its approach to establishing a system of governance that complies with the interest of the conquering

¹ Abdaljawad Omar has also talked about this policy of maiming, at being shot by an IOF sniper below the waist, in his article *Crosshairs* (www.rustedradishes.com/crosshairs).

² "An unyielding will to continue": An Interview with Abdaljawad Omar on October 7th and the Palestinian Resistance (www.ebb-magazine.com/essays/an-unyielding-will-to-continue).

³ "Eretz Israel" is a Zionist expansionist concept, referring to the supposed historical borders of ancient Israel.

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power—the traitors, the compradors, the traditional hierarchies that can be bought off or given symbolic and political power through their reliance on the conquering power. In counterinsurgency proponents’ view, distinguishing between insurgents and civilians aims to portray the conquering power as also serving the broader population’s interests, thereby reducing resistance to its presence and enabling such cooperation to come to the fore.

The primary methods Israel has been using in this war echo the era of pre-precision artillery and total warfare doctrines, where the civilian population is the main target. The breakdown of Gaza’s central civic nodes is just one phase in a series of strategies that include inducing famine, torture, humiliation, and degradation. These tactics aim to dismantle Gaza’s social fabric and keep it in a state of perpetual trauma, while also pursuing, to the extent politically feasible, the ethnic cleansing of Gaza to render it uninhabitable. This strategy is not particularly new; massacres have occurred throughout Palestinian history, from the early days of British rule to the present, with the specter of massacre looming over Palestinian politics both as a historical fact and a future threat. Each massacre is unique, tied to its specific context, the immediate conditions prompting it, the prevailing logic, the available technologies and tools for execution, and the system of alliances that support and legitimize it. In other words, Israel’s current doctrine has elevated civilians and civilian infrastructure to a “center of gravity” while downgrading the traditional set of targets—leadership of resistance groups, military infrastructure, resistance fighters, etc.⁴ This is evident in the lack of what American policymakers term a day after of the war, in the rhetoric of military and political leaders in Israel, and of course in the ultimate use of massacre as a nihilistic tool of elimination.

The Nakba, from a Zionist point of view, was an unfinished and incomplete endeavor. While it enabled the establishment of the state of Israel, it did not conclude the conflict or struggle over Palestine. The demographic, political, and social presence of Palestinians, along with their capacity for various forms of resistance—such as civil disobedience, steadfastness,

⁴ Center of Gravity is a concept developed by Carl Von Clausewitz and is meant to denote where mass is concentrated. In military studies, the term is often used to identify the most effective targets in military operations or the targets that would render the enemy incapable of further resistance.

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refusal to leave, and armed resistance—have persisted. Israel finds itself ensnared in a paradigm where it holds “sovereign” power yet remains fragile, vulnerable, and unable to assert its presence without relying on barricades, garrisons, modern-day castles (i.e., illegal settlements), walls, checkpoints, prisons, and daily acts of violence. Within the mosaic of Zionist ideological currents, the fascist right wing, which advocates for a decisive end to Palestinian existence on the land of Palestine, epitomizes this drive toward annihilation. This is not a matter of differing desires among most Zionist ideological factions, as the majority wish for the disappearance of the Palestinians. The distinctions lie in the tactics and strategic consequences. It is, therefore, not surprising that Israel would see on October 7th *an opportunity for the programmatic end of Palestinian life, not only in Gaza but throughout historic Palestine.*

The challenges it faces are fourfold. First, there is the tenacity of the armed resistance in the Gaza Strip and the support that allies and forces of the Palestinian resistance are providing for Gaza. Second is the system of alliances that Israel has built with the help of the United States, which allows the current situation to unfold without a concrete response from the Arab state system. However, it also imposes certain “conditions” on the Israeli state, including its inability to expel the Palestinians from historic Palestine, despite cornering them in Rafah or adjacent to the Egyptian border, without risking the breakdown or erosion of these alliances. The third challenge arises from the potential for a wider eruption among Palestinians in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and inside the 1948 lands, which could leave Israel facing three fronts and disrupt the day-to-day life of Israelis, especially in the West Bank and Jerusalem. A fourth challenge is the willingness of Israeli society to sustain the war for months with no end in sight, entering a zone of attrition that will cost Israel morally, diplomatically, legally, and in terms of international public opinion. These forces will have long-term implications, but they will also exact a price on Israel for its current drive to extinguish the hope for Palestine and to end the presence of Palestinians in the land.

What is perhaps central in all of this is time, the time to expand the horizon of the massacre faced head on with the time of Palestinian ability to withstand one of the largest, most equipped, and pampered military forces in the world. It’s a struggle over time, and in many ways, Palestin-

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ians understand this; they are fighting to “compress” this time to shorten it but are also unwilling to end to war through capitulation.

Throughout the current war and massacres in Gaza, Palestinians in Gaza have been posing a legitimate question: Where is the rest of Palestine? This question reflects a pervasive feeling among many in Gaza that they are enduring their hardships alone, and the simplicity of the question hides the complexity of the reality of the West Bank and Jerusalem. The spatial arrangements in the West Bank and the current political and economic systems—built on the premise of cooperation—reflect the historic victory of the pragmatist-realist current in the PLO following the Second Intifada, which resulted in the West Bank’s politics being dominated by cooperation with Israel. Cooperation that is built on the holy trinity: defeatism, comprador class interests, and separation. The defeatism is central to the ability of the current system to reproduce itself in time. It simply claims that resistance brings to the fore nightmares. It does not work; it has not worked and it will not work. The comprador class made of an alliance between Palestinian security heads, capitalist class interests, and political figures benefits from the extraction of surplus through its hold of the Palestinian economy. The third spatial separateness with Israel renders mass forms of action and tactics ineffective. Palestinians are locked in ghettos and *Bantustans* without the ability to conjure up effective collection action.⁵

Despite this, there is a growing realization in the West Bank of what was already known: We live in a horizon of annihilation and, if Israel succeeds in Gaza, it’s a matter of time before things will happen and unfold in the rest of Palestine. This is an uncomfortable truth, but one that is beginning to be acknowledged. While this does not necessarily mean we will witness a mass eruption of an intifada, it does however have implications for the

⁵ *Bantustans* were small territories set aside by the settler regime in Apartheid South Africa. The term means homeland. Similarly, the West Bank has been divided by Israel into three distinct areas: Area A where most Palestinians live constitutes about 18% of land in the West Bank, Area B has a significant Palestinian presence and constitutes 22% of land, and Area C is around 60% of the West is under total Israeli control.

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nature of Palestinian responses to Gaza, from fear and paralysis to truth and its realization, towards a more confrontational and defiant politics.

Material: We would like to discuss the balance of forces as they existed historically and as they exist now in regards to strategic implications for “a more confrontational and defiant politics,” but we want to first examine something that was striking in your above response. Namely, what you said about the kind of exterminationist counterinsurgency methods Israel is utilizing. There is something historic about this, as you imply, and it also stretches back to the genocidal colonial warfare that marked, for example, the construction of the US and Canadian settler projects. In these periods, the logic of Conquest, and then the logic of counter-insurgency following Conquest, did not distinguish between civilians and combatants amongst the Indigenous populations because it sought to replace them. But even though we are hundreds of years from these events, that same counter-insurgent logic manifests whenever the surviving nations of that period of genocide resist.

What seems important here is that there is a particular logic in settler-colonial contexts that informs the way in which settler states function—militarily, socially, ideologically. Recently, there has been a general refusal to grasp this amongst certain sectors of the “left.” Ben Burgis, for example, wrote a terrible piece for Jacobin claiming that such an analysis was akin to ethno-nationalism, treating the Zionist claim that Israeli settlers were also “Indigenous” because of their religion, as valid.⁶ Even some academics who uphold forms of “decolonial” analysis have failed in this area—I’m thinking of Adam Shatz who you aptly responded to back in November with your article for *Mondoweiss*.⁷ Can you discuss the value of a rigorous understanding of colonialism, and a rigorous anti-colonial viewpoint as necessary for what we would call *a concrete analysis of a concrete situation*?

Abdaljawad Omar: The Palestinian ordeal, when viewed through the Western lens, is intrinsically linked to the profound, philosophical, politi-

⁶ Ben Burgis, “No One’s Rights Should Depend on Where Their Ancestors Lived,” *Jacobin*, March 7, 2024, jacobin.com/2024/03/rights-ancestors-land-israel-palestine.

⁷ Abdaljawad Omar, “Hopeful pathologies in the war for Palestine: a reply to Adam Shatz,” *Mondoweiss*, November 8, 2023, mondoweiss.net/2023/11/hopeful-pathologies-in-the-war-for-palestine-a-reply-to-adam-shatz.

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cal, economic, and cultural roots of what Édouard Glissant defines as “The West as Project.” There exists an intricate and multi-layered relationship with Israel, imbued with historical, cultural, and psychological nuances. However, fundamentally, Israel embodies a colonial endeavor—a belated colonial enterprise, a testament to colonialism that emerged out of time, at the very moment that direct forms of colonialism were coming to an end—it simply arrived too late. Tony Judt eloquently stated the paradox of Israel’s situation: it emerged prominently just as other colonial endeavors like the United States, Canada, South Africa, and Australia had solidified their existence at the expense of indigenous peoples.

It is particularly revealing, for example, that when Israeli logic of expansion and elimination is questioned by Americans or representatives from various settler colonial nations, the response from Israelis often delves into highlighting the colonial past of the interrogators themselves. This deflection/reminder underscores a shared legacy of colonization and conquest. An attempt by Israelis to remind their interrogators, “I am you.”

Such dynamics paint Israel not just as a geopolitical entity but as a symbol, epitomizing the darkest exploits of grander imperialist and colonial powers over five centuries—marked by conquest, enslavement, relentless capitalist expansion, exploitation, and extermination. Yet, there is also an element of nostalgic exercise, a resurgence of the Western demons, reflecting a repressed collective unconscious that finds secret validation through Israel’s logic of annihilation of the Palestinians. The entrenched systems of racial segregation, the devaluation of life, and the devastation witnessed in Gaza extend beyond the physical confines of that besieged land, reflecting a broader, more pervasive imperial and colonial tendency.

Indeed, there is considerable discourse regarding Israel’s relationship with European anti-Semitism. However, it would be a significant error to restrict our understanding of Zionism solely to the Jewish experience in 19th and 20th-century Europe. Equally, confining the current conflict to the geographical confines of Gaza, now devastated, would overlook the broader implications of maintaining this imperial and colonial stronghold (Israel) as a marker of “Western” and European influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and Arab world. Thus, a pivotal question emerges from the events of October 7th—a question often ignored or marginalized: does the “left”—a precarious term at best—belong to the transformative event

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of October 7th or will it insist on remaining an outsider? How do we construct an idiom to encapsulate this moment, its implications, and its relevance to people's struggles across the globe—both in the metropole and in the colonies and neo-colonies?

The typical response is to reduce the struggle over Palestine to a cultural or tribal issue, simplifying it to a quarrel between ancient kin and thus avoiding the revolutionary implications it holds. Others elevate the religious ideology of Hamas to denounce the attack or scrutinize the lack of distinction between civilians and combatants to delegitimize resistance, thereby sidestepping the necessity for an ethical judgment grounded in concrete situations. For those, a moral formula exists where condemnation can be bequeathed without the rigorous excavation of conditions and contradictions, without a process of examination, and without an intellectual due process.

This avoidance is why many on the left find themselves on the “outside” to such a pivotal event. I wish to clarify that I am not addressing tactics designed for broad political appeal but rather the intrinsic challenge posed by the Al-Aqsa Flood.⁸ This military action necessitates a profound and often uncomfortable response from those broadly speaking sympathetic to the Palestinian predicament or permits the rise of new lines of differentiation among large political coalitions. Within these confines, the dialectical constitution of political action, the historicity of the Palestinian subject, and the creative agency of Palestinians are sent to the gallows of profanity and moral abhorrence. I have never fetishized resistance or rendered it an object that can also become a fetishistic object of admiration. I find both positions to be problematic: the profane and sacred. Resistance is a complex phenomenon in its genesis, effects, predicaments, organizational modalities, choices, creativity, and psycho-affective political and ideological elements. Yet I find it abhorrent to render it beyond the pale, as a phenomenon of the underworld, or simply as a metaphysical call to action. Resistance is grounded in the concrete, and its analysis is also an analysis of concrete. Tragically, when this is done, it is almost done only by the enemies of resistance.

⁸ Al-Aqsa Flood is the name of the offensive military operation the Palestinian resistances in Gaza conducted on October 7th.

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Furthermore, some on the left take seriously the narratives colonizers craft about themselves, notably their claims to indigenous status in Palestine. Here, genetic, biblical, and Talmudic claims are utilized to justify what is essentially a conquest masquerading as a return to an ancestral homeland—a notion historically and politically fraught with issues. This pattern is not unique to Israel; colonial history is replete with settlers claiming native status or divine rights, from the Afrikaners in South Africa to the European settlers in the Americas. While it’s true that connections to the land of Palestine span across all Abrahamic faiths, the portrayal of European Zionists as reclaimers rather than settlers dismisses the complex histories of those who lived and intermingled in the region. This argument, suggesting a rightful return rather than an imposition, is fundamentally flawed. The arrival of European Zionists was not about coexistence or living among or with Palestinians but an existence at the expense of Palestinians, a declaration of colonial sovereignty where Palestinians are reduced to an exception and removed by force from the land. Many others migrated to Palestine and lived with Palestinians; Armenians, Moroccans, Algerians, Kurds, Circassians, and others. The European Zionists came as colonial conquerors intending to sustain a sovereign hold on Palestine and the arguments over their indigeneity are meant to legitimize their offensive war on Palestinians. It is in this light, that the identity of the current unfolding genocide in Gaza is wrapped with Jewish cloths, where the Zionists instrumentalize the Jews to create a narrative about the necessity of catastrophe, the realization of Nakba 2.0.

For this reason and much more, it seems to me that October 7th embodies a central question about our contemporary era. It presents those who answer the question I posed earlier in the affirmative. Indeed, it’s a question of belonging to the wrath of the oppressed; to the desire to break through the “impossible” wall of persistent imperialism, colonialism, and capitalist exploitation, and presents us with a new task for thinking; to broach walls and rethink what Gramsci would exalt as “common sense.” The systematic production of death and corpses signifies the destruction of the “moral” code of a liberal international legal and international order, one that is premised on the notion of shared “humanity.” It has exposed

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the rot in the center of liberal pretensions. But more significantly, the event, this breakthrough, and the flood are not a local Palestinian event.

The assault on Palestine and the corpses of Palestinians buried under the rubble signify an attack not only on Palestinians but on the human condition itself. This historical trajectory hails from the early voyages of Christopher Columbus, weaving through the enduring legacies of colonialism and imperial expansion. In Gaza, we witness not merely the present anguish but the spectral presence of the enslaved embarking on their voyages across the Atlantic. We encounter the silent testimonies of Algerians executed by the French. Attentively listening, we become custodians of the residual pain from colonial conflicts—the lamentations of Indian farmers; the extensive killings in the Philippines; and the catastrophic bombings in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. We stand witness to the disintegration of Iraq and Syria and the persistent suffering of Africa. The dismemberment of Indigenous societies in both South and North America, with millions sacrificed on the altar of European supremacy and domination, unfolds before us, all at once, all in this moment.

In this extensive historical lineage, we discern that for Europeans, the “Other,” the Indigenous, was never truly considered an “Other,” meaning a human who deserves recognition. Intriguingly, this history also reveals that the only “Other” sanctioned to emerge as an Other is the internal “other”—the Zionist Jews expelled from Europe and authorized to construct their “villa” in the so-called West Asian “jungle,” just beyond the confines of the European “garden.” Indeed, the contemporary epoch is imbued with nostalgia for many, an aching for a bygone era of unchallenged conquest and genocide, unencumbered by the need for justification and capable of unleashing horror without remorse, responsibility, or consequences. Its danger lies not only in that it is currently inflicted on Gaza but the potential it holds to boomerang across the globe. Not to mention the very fact that it is also a message to the wretched, global south and all people on earth that this is what imperial technological superiority can inflict on you.

Yet, my pity extends towards this “colonial left,” which persists in championing social justice selectively and which culturalizes or pathologizes the outcries and ingenuity of the oppressed Palestinians, thereby ensuring their nocturnal tranquility. This left, I pity, because it occludes the avenues for

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organizing, for collective action, for the unearthing of truths and forging class alliances, for refusing to think and stretch the criteria for the possibility of judgment. It abandons the transformative potential inherent in moments of upheaval by opting to remain on the outside of the question of belonging to an uprising such as the one that unfolded on October 7th.

Material: It’s definitely true that there is something to be pitied in those sections of the left that possess this selective myopia. This is sadly, as we’re sure you know, not an isolated phenomenon; at key historical moments and contexts certain sectors of the anti-capitalist left have failed in their historical task. We have seen this from the great revolutionary movements in the past, to every meaningful struggle. Line struggle is always immanent since the dominant ideologies are this reality’s “common sense” and rigorous work is required to break from them—especially in the imperialist metropolises. Many fail in this area, which is why antagonistic contradictions emerge within this left itself, with many individuals and groups falling into mechanical liberal analyses that dictate their practice, if they even have a form of practice to begin with. Which is why, as you note above, “the rigorous excavation of conditions and contradictions, without a process of examination, without an intellectual due process,” is going to fail to produce any form of meaningful resistance, let alone solidarity with the oppressed in Palestine or elsewhere.

In the above answer you note the importance of thinking this concrete situation, which is something that is part of *Material’s* mission statement: one of the reasons for founding this journal was because we thought it was important for having a comradely struggle in the realm of thought amongst various (and non-chauvinist) traditions of the anti-capitalist left. So with that in mind we want to pivot to the topic we mentioned earlier and one that immediately comes to mind when you talk about “the rise of new lines of differentiation among large political coalitions” as well as the “organizational modalities, choices, creativity” of resistance. Your own research work is interested in issues of tactics, operations, strategy, and militant epistemology—grounded, of course, in the kind of concrete analysis of the concrete situation we’ve been talking about. So let’s move towards

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these questions in regards to Palestine and, hopefully, to their implications and relationship with other resistance movements.

Here we want to begin by discussing the balance of forces in Palestine. In the past worldwide anti-imperialist movement, the secular left forces were quite strong. Groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine were eventually decimated and temporarily marginalized; Fatah (as you indicated in a previous point of our discussion) under Arafat turned into the Palestinian Authority post-Oslo and ended up managing and containing Palestinian revolt; since then there was the growth of Islamicist organizations such as Hamas. During this period there was also the emergence of spontaneous mass rebellions—the two Intifadas which you research—that injected new life into the movement but without the same structures for those operationalized by these rebellions to enter and renew. Can you speak a little about this history and what the balance of forces look like in Palestine now?

Abdaljawad Omar: I have been thinking deeply about our current historical conjuncture. I am attempting to outline a network of forces that intersect across the psycho-affective, military, ideological, and political challenges faced directly by Palestinians, within which the current war exists as a suspended moment, one that remains plagued by the fog of war and the metamorphosis of this war into a programmatic genocide. At this juncture, it appears we are witnessing a deformation of the colonial condition and its regimes of forms as it stood pre-October 7th, yet decolonization remains unachieved. Historically, one of the broad effects of resistance in Palestine has been its ability to instigate this process of deformation. In this context, many, for instance, may perceive the Oslo process in the 1990s as a “capitulation” by the PLO, and largely, they would be correct in making such an assessment. However, I maintain that this should not be the sole lens through which we view Oslo or the 1990s.

Oslo represented the culmination of the deformation of direct military occupation, a process significantly shaped by the resistances that emerged within occupied Palestine in the late 1980s. In this light, Oslo emerged as the outcome of a dynamic interplay of contradictions and forces, which could be interpreted as the PLO’s symbolic capitulation grappling with its exile to the margins in Tunisia. Simultaneously, it underscored Israel’s

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inability to sustain its colonial project without granting at least a nominal recognition of the Palestinian people and establishing a political and spatial separation, alongside a local authority to implement its directives. This turning point was a direct result of the First Intifada. This uprising signaled a call to action and marked a historic shift in the locus of resistance from being predominantly based within the diaspora’s refugee camps to embedding itself in the villages, towns, and camps of the West Bank and Gaza. This shift does not suggest that the West Bank and Gaza were devoid of resistance before this; rather, it indicates that the epicenter of resistance and the quest for liberation found a new locus. There is much to be discussed regarding the transmission of the ideas and practices of resistance. However, delving into this would lead us to a different inquiry, one that delves into the complexity of contingencies, geopolitical conditions, outcomes of past conflicts, and the enduring commitment to resistance in the region, most notably in Lebanon.

Alongside the ideological, institutional, and coercive war that accompanied Oslo a war that led to the NGOization of the radical left, the erection of a captive bureaucracy composed of local Palestinian forces mixed with the professional revolutionary cadre of the PLO that returned with Oslo, the rise of consumerist ideologies with its emphasis on individuality and class differentiation, the production of new desires, tastes, and accompanied with intergenerational trauma. These developments were analytically investigated by many academics, thinkers, and writers prescribing the “hegemonic” moment that Oslo signified. A space of defeat where politics is rendered impossible. This is in essence what Oslo also embodied in these works on political economy, social transformations and disfigurements, labor, and bureaucracy, and ultimately, we can say that fell intentionally or unintentionally within sociologies, anthropologies, and political economies of defeat or were attempts to defend what was already judged as a “lost cause.”

However, the 1990s in the West Bank and Gaza were also the beginnings of a large-scale program of arming the Palestinians, the production of new novel objects of insurgency like IEDs and the human bomb, the creation of new tactics, and developing capacities to resist while also reformulating modulations of revolutionary and militant organizing. This line of flight, to quote Deleuze and Guattari, is perhaps the unrepresented core

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that goes unnoticed in Palestinian politics and by many in the Palestinian intelligentsia culminating in October 7th.⁹ Therefore, October 7th is the break and continuance at once. It serves to highlight the maturation of armed resistance and its capacity to conduct an offensive military operation, to surprise and take the war to 1948 occupied lands, and a testament to its capacity to resist the brutal aerial bombardment, the wide-scale invasion of Israel's ground forces. But it is also a break not due to its military tactics, nor infrastructure, but in large part due to its offensive character and the scale of the offensive.

Now, we need to situate the offensive character of October 7th in a more concrete sense. It is a product of endogenous projects tied to the Palestinian fidelity to the intifadas and the accumulation of power since the 1980s within Palestine, one in which Gaza became the primary locus after the defeat of resistances in the Second Intifada in the West Bank. But this attack was also the consequence of regional resistant formations that have been accumulating power since the early 1980s. In other words, it is part of the complex history of disparate forces bound through their anti-imperial and anti-colonial resistance. In the 1980s, we saw the rise of Hezbollah as a militant force that began protracted warfare aimed at forcing Israeli and other international forces to retreat from Lebanon, culminating in a mismanaged and hasty Israeli withdrawal in 2000, or the liberation of Southern Lebanon. These regional forces have been accumulating power, including the power of deterrence, attempting, despite the asymmetry in power, to achieve a balance of forces with Israel. In 2006, the Israel war on Lebanon reinforced the need for a strategy that builds on the notion of mutually assured pain.

One of the most surprising aspects of this accumulation of power on the part of resistances is the fact that Israel never pounced on the opportunity that the Syrian civil war opened up to launch a preemptive war on Lebanon. In 1967, Israel took Egypt and Syria by surprise during Egyptian involvement in the Yemeni Civil War between 1962 and 1970. Israel has always pounced on opportunities when its arch-enemies were bogged

⁹ A line of flight for Deleuze and Guattari is a path of mutations and changes that is linked to the capacity to affect and be affected. It is a concept developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* and was meant to underscore the ability and capacity to generate new forms of existence, a process of becoming that defies existing systems. For Deleuze and Guattari these mutations chart new territories for thought and action.

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down in conflicts that took a toll on their military capabilities and posture. One of the primary factors for not pouncing was the equilibrium of forces and the mutually assured pain that resistances in the region have forced on Israel. Since 2006, no major war occurred outside historic Palestine with Israel. This was already indicative that despite the blows that Israel managed to accumulate through American and international support within Iran, Syria, and Lebanon, the strategic accumulation of power on the part of Iran and its system of alliances was well underway. After Hezbollah’s withdrawal from the Syrian civil war, the resistance formations in the region initiated a strategy of linking its disparate “zones” and forces, a policy that was titled the “unity of squares.” This strategy signaled the move from managing the outcomes of the Arab Spring and its consequences in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria towards a refocus on Palestine. The idea was to create a military alliance pact that would link the entire network in key moments of conflict with the US and Israel. October 7th, in many ways, could be seen as an opening salvo in a new phase of struggle with Israel, one that moved from strategic defense (1982–2006) to a second stage of strategic equilibrium (2006–2023), and now an attempt at an initial strategic offensive through a cunning initiative.

The October 7th is an attempt to put into practice the Maoist concept of a third stage in a protracted war. However, it remains within the confines of an initial salvo wedded to the asymmetric power conditions, and intended to take the war to Israel. This stage sees guerilla and resistance forces moving towards a counter-offensive. Mao described his three stages as a “rough sketch,” not a concrete, predetermined outcome from which one could predict any concrete end. However, we can roughly outline the phases of Palestinian resistance: initiated through civil disobedience in the First Intifada; moving into consolidation during the Second Intifada in Gaza specifically; and then laboring to produce a counter-offensive, exemplified by the events of October 7th and conjoined with this regional formation that supplanted the Palestinian resistance with know-how, weapons, and ultimately with support in the current war. The war of attrition in Lebanon and the targeted closure of Bab Al-Mandab in Yemen stand out. Within this framework, October 7th stands out as a significant marker of the capacity to dismantle Israel’s construction of space and its modalities of control, surveillance, and governing regimes in the Gaza Strip and its

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environs. More significantly, October 7th marks a shift in the balance of forces. It heralded the rise of an armed movement, equipped with the capacity to innovate and create, to build and labor, and to train and arm, thereby launching an offensive attack at the frontiers of the Settler State.

The war remains a “suspended moment,” with no end in sight. The current conflict has proven successful on three fronts: it has shifted public opinion in the imperial core, particularly among a new generation; reignited third-world solidarities as symbolically, legally, and politically articulated by many post-colonial states or political formations in the global south; and elevated the issue of Palestine to a pressing international and geopolitical predicament for the empire.

These are significant shifts on the global battlefield, exacting moral, diplomatic, economic, and political costs from Israel—effects that will take time to fully manifest. Secondly, the massive offensive maneuver against a paranoid power (Israel) exposed to all the genocidal collective unconscious of Israel. In essence, it has unveiled to outsiders the reality and conditions of a war characterized by the continuous expansion of illegal settlements, land confiscation, exploitation of Palestinian labor, extensive carceral systems, and regimes of death and annihilation faced by Palestinians, with or without October 7th. Thirdly, it has deepened the line of differentiation in the Arab world between comprador Arab classes managing various post-colonial states and the forces of resistance in the region. This has produced a galvanizing effect that will also take time to manifest openly, especially among states that have rendered throughout the Arab Spring its opposition forces mute, terrified, and dispersed—unions, student movements, and political formations.

Israel’s strategy was not one of retreat but one of doubling down. To exact on Palestinians a murderous offensive, hoping to turn the Palestinian exploration of the third stage of protracted war into an opportunity to intensify its desire for the liquidation of the Palestinian presence in the land of Palestine. It takes solace in imperial identification and support; its system of alliances in the region; and the military prowess it possesses, what its ex-military chief called, “an efficient killing machine.” It’s fighting to contain the flood to its systems but is bogging itself down in the war of attrition in Gaza and Lebanon. Exhibiting its unremorseful ability to kill, its zero-sum logic, and its lack of hesitancy in using and employing weap-

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ons and systems to kill Gaza. This is precisely the role its fascist messianic spearhead movements—Itamar Ben-Gvir and others—play in its body politics: “use what you have and don’t think twice, unleash the beast.”

The current balance of forces has a historical twist. Israel’s military doctrine has generally been joined to the notion of speedy, compressed wars fought on the terrain of the enemy. Currently, Palestinian resistance seeks to both compress the war and ensure the mitigation of some of its worst outcomes—the return of the displaced Palestinians, the entry of humanitarian aid, the return of governance structures, rebuilding of generations of infrastructure destroyed by Israel. It was the result of Israel’s deliberate targeting of the Palestinian civic space and Palestinian society at large that the compression of war became a necessity. Meaning, without this particular total strategy, the prolongation of the war is amenable to an armed strategy that draws Israel in and then exhausts its military in the long-drawn war of attrition. The historical twist lies in that: a desire among Palestinians to compress the “time of the war” as opposed to Israel’s insistence on extending it. This was partially the outcome of the paranoid fear that permeates Israeli society and its existential anxiety born out of the subterranean truth that Israel was constructed on the trinity of lies, theft, and killing. A moment Israeli society has read as one that demands sustained and prolonged warfare and is reinforced by misinformation, disinformation, and control of the flow of information coming out of Gaza and its battlefield. Indeed, three elements will prove vital in the ability of Israel to continue this war: first is its own will or erosion of this will (with little sign that this is changing). Second, the expansion of the war to other fronts in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, West Bank, Jerusalem, and the region. Third is the imperial centers’ continued support for Israel’s war and the nature of this support. A fourth factor, also difficult to foreknow, is capitulation on the part of Palestinian resistance. It is difficult to foresee precisely because Israel has chosen this form of total warfare on life in Gaza. It simply left resistance forces with little to lose.

The immediate future is bleak as we enter into this zone of Israel’s insistence on a day after when Gaza either is annihilated or ethnically cleansed or remains ungovernable with persistent military occupation. However, it is also entering a space for the perpetuation of friction, as military parlance would have it, of the return of body bags and injured and tough dilem-

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mas as the economic, political, moral, and diplomatic costs incur. Not to mention its inability to be decisive thus far when it comes to confronting head-on armed forces exacting a price on its northern frontiers or in other locales in the region. As things stand, the strategic dilemmas Israel faces are numerous, including the formation and consolidation of an axis with extensive geography, personal, and military power embodied in Iran, Hezbollah, Ansar Allah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and PFLP among others. Israel stands to either risk the expansion of the war to other fronts or draw its imperial supporters to a large-scale regional war that would disrupt the economic recovery after COVID and could lead, among other things, to embroilment of the US in another major Middle East war, with outcomes uncertain, and also in some of scenarios apocalyptic—possible use of nuclear weapons (a non-zero chance).

Many of Israel's security elite and strategists are hopeful that by the end of this year, the tide will turn to their side. That as it enters 2025, Israel will have a better outlook, and it will come out having defeated the resistance in Gaza and rendered Lebanon mute. Those in Israel hope that it will also consolidate its alliances with Arab states, and eventually, it will be able to contain the public opinion fallout from its mass killing across the globe. However, it is also possible that outcomes will not match these hopes. That Israel will become a pariah state protected only by a handful of elites in the Arab world and the West. It will be seen as a dependent colony that is more of a burden than an asset, and one that will have to face increasing boycotts, divestment, and sanctions among other legal and economic costs. Its society will see the breakdown in its security doctrines, incompetency, callousness in dealing with those imprisoned by the Palestinian resistance in the wake of October 7th, and rejection from the world as a price too high to pay or one that indicates the rot and decay in the state itself. The momentary unity of Israeli society around the war could easily break down as its political class fights to get rid of Prime Minister Netanyahu and the significant coalition he represents. The struggle over Israel itself from within will return with a vengeance.

This could be coupled with the increasing American hold and influence over Israel, one that was already apparent in the initial days when Israel called for American deterrence to support it in containing any possible offensive moves from the regional formation of resistances led by Iran. It

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is also apparent in Israel's dependency on weapons from the US, including vital supplies of precision missiles, artillery, and ammunition, without which it would be hard for Israel to sustain a prolonged war. The long-hailed Israeli desire for independence and its self-perception as a power in itself was exposed to be more myth than reality. This dependence will incur costs for Israel as other powers will have more influence over its political and strategic choices. Israel feels that time is on its side and that its extension of power serves to postpone internal reckoning, but this will also erode the ability of the Palestinian resistance to sustain the war. What is true, however, is that for the first time in decades, Israel's war has ramifications on its home front; economically, it displaces Israelis from the frontiers along the border with Gaza and Lebanon; the extensive loss of personal and material resources; dependence on foreign powers; and a postponed internal reckoning coming at the heels of the biggest rift in Israeli politics, including the drafting of the Haredim and the proposed changes to the legal system by the religious right-wing.¹⁰ But in many ways, time also works against Israel; it is like someone addicted to smoking who hails the effects of nicotine on metabolism while dismissing the lung cancer spreading throughout his body. But more importantly, it's the fact that Israel has used its extensive power; it has unleashed its arsenal—large-scale air bombardment and invasion—that gives this moment a radical potentiality, contingent on the ability of resistance to withstand and persevere in Gaza and across the region. Frustrating a more-equipped power like Israel does not necessitate a decisive victory on the battlefield but is only contingent on the ability of resistance to deny victory. This reality will prove to Israel and its society that its military—the hammer it wields on every problem—is not the answer and will mold Israeli consciousness in the medium-run in ways that open up numerous political possibilities. Israel is heading towards a triad of issues: becoming on many levels an

¹⁰ The Haredim are an ultra-Orthodox Jewish denomination exempted from military service at the outset of the establishment of the state in 1948. Currently, Israel hopes to use this moment to expand its recruits and integrate a growing demographic through its recruitment in the army. The religious-secular struggle within Israel is old, but the increasing number of ultra-orthodox in Israeli society, the economic burden they represent, and their refusal to partake in secular institutions—economy and army—is increasingly becoming an Israeli fault line.

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electoral and strategic liability, increased isolation, and most likely the inability to proclaim a decisive victory.

Material: This “momentary unity” of Israeli society is worth digging into. As we discussed regarding the settler-colonial context, in moments when the colonized resist, large swathes of settler society suddenly become united. In Canada, as one of the articles in this issue of *Material* discusses, when the Indigenous community of Kahnésatake put up barricades to resist settler incursion in 1990—and the Canadian Armed Forces were eventually called in—the majority of the Canadian settler population in the surrounding regions suddenly became colonial defenders, even if some of these had been more liberal and friendly neighbors beforehand. Suddenly they were burning Mohawk effigies and chanting “savages” or lining up on the road to assault the Mohawk elders and children who were being evacuated from the warzone.

Similarly, political divisions in the majority of Israeli society have become unified in the belief that the unfolding genocide in Gaza is necessary. They may talk about this colonial “necessity” in different ways (the more liberal might deny it is a genocide, might claim it is all about self defense, whereas the more conservative will openly celebrate ethnic cleansing), but there is this unity. In what you call “the world before October 7th” there was a division in Israeli society regarding Netanyahu, but now that division is revealed as being largely cosmetic. Indeed, all sections of the political class reflect this agreement about the genocidal war on Gaza—if they differ, it seems to only be on tactics—which means it is hardly a Netanyahu problem as some liberals in the US, Canada, and Europe like to say. So, are there any internal divisions within colonial society that are meaningful right now, any fault lines that can be utilized by the Palestinian resistance?

Abdaljawad Omar: It is perhaps fundamental to understand the extent and depth of the militarism that has pervaded the construction of the Zionist state at the heart of the Arab world. The scope of this project is immense, as it involves not only the displacement of the Palestinian people but also the construction and perpetuation of a regional order that acquiesces to Israel’s persistence in the region. This partially explains why the conflict over Palestine is not solely a Palestinian issue in the strictest sense. This militarism was so foundational for the Zionist movement that Ze’ev

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Jabotinsky¹¹ acknowledged from the beginning that Israel lives and dies by the sword. This militarism is so pervasive that it forms the very fabric of the construction of the “new Hebrew,” the mythical foundation upon which Zionism builds its edifice of technological superiority, military power, and the assertion that ultimately “might equals right.”

Much has been said about fascism being closely tied to the paternal figure, promising societal and individual transformation, its reliance on and repetition of propaganda, and its celebration of military chauvinism. This is also why fascism found a sympathetic audience within the Zionist movement; the ethos of vertical mobilization and unapologetic militarism permeated many of its foundational texts and political formations, later becoming part of Israel’s institutional and social ethos. The People’s Army served as both the ground for the shaping and reshaping of this ideological conceptualization of the “new Hebrew” and as one of the primary pedagogical institutions for the perpetuation of Zionism, a rite of passage immortalized through mandatory military service. This ethos is also intricately connected to the racialization and exclusion of Palestinian Arabs, perpetuating their otherness, leading to their being stripped, humiliated, arrested, killed, and ultimately erased.

Many around the world highlight ideological differences among various Zionist factions. They cite the liberal-left emphasis on constitutional frameworks, the importance of democracy, and the crucial role of the judiciary in checking political leadership excesses. They underline the internal struggle within Israel over the trajectory of its society and politics. However, it is crucial to recognize that, seen through Palestinian eyes, this differentiation collapses. Regarding the treatment of Palestinians, the dominant narrative within Zionism remains predominantly fascist and eliminatory. The supposedly progressive vision of Rabin, a liberal-leftist Israeli political leader and the lion of the Israeli left, wished that “Gaza would be swallowed by the sea.” The parapraxis and unconscious desires of the Israeli

¹¹ Jabotinsky was one of the key architects of Zionism and author of *The Iron Wall*. An anti-communist and an admirer of Italian Fascism, Jabotinsky organized opposition to the Jewish Labour Bund in Europe and made overtures to Mussolini. He is most notorious, however, for founding the Irgun, the colonial death squad responsible for numerous acts of ethnic cleansing during the Nakba including (alongside the Lehi, a paramilitary organization) the infamous massacre of Deir Yassin.

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Zionist left are simply the conscious and professed biases of its religious and fascist pole.

Interestingly, you mention Benjamin Netanyahu, who epitomizes for me this characteristic of shrewdness, his clever and calculated political maneuvers, his fluent English, and his capacity to rally significant segments of Israel's society behind his ambitions and glory. Following the events of October 7th, the entire world dismissed the ability of Netanyahu to survive the political fallout from the breakdown in Israel's Iron Wall security doctrine. However, these assessments were too hasty. Netanyahu is currently navigating the energies of the right wing while promoting their agenda for the transformation of Israeli institutions and society through a wide-ranging reform program.

This program aims to make Israel more religious and less democratic, even within its "Jewish" space, and more committed to eradicating the "Arab problem." This agenda is the result of demographic shifts in Israel's social fabric and the desire for ideological closure that a doctrine based on divine religious rights sanctions. Within this framework, Benjamin Netanyahu stands as both an astute political figure and a master of his political craft but also as a figure who shields the outright fascists from any possible backlash by the imperial metropolis. In many ways, Netanyahu personifies this paternal figure, respected and manipulated by his right-wing adherents. I do not believe that October 7th represents the end of his career; even if he occupies a position on the right wing in the next elections, he remains a figure who will continue to influence Israel's political landscape. He will give a sense of stability even within the terms of disorder that he and his coalition face (war) or initiate (internal reforms). The power and paradox of Netanyahu are twofold, he is at once a father figure, both loved and hated, capable of mobilizing large swaths, and creating alliances of convenience, while also arousing defiance and resistance by the other pole of Israeli society—the Tel Avivians and liberals. The Israeli center thinks that the fall of Netanyahu is the fall of this right-wing hegemony and religious direction. However, Netanyahu is a symptom of demographic changes within Israeli society, the rise of new social groups, and the increasing energy and power of spearheading movements mobilized and always on the move, embodying the drive behind expansion and replacement at the expense of Palestinians. It was almost logical that this

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once small minority would slowly but surely attempt to hegemonize Israeli politics and reformulate its social contract. Currently, they see Netanyahu as a vulnerable and powerful ally. The chances of him staying in power are not insignificant.

We have also witnessed the scope and depth of this division in the past year when the remnants of Israel’s liberal-center base engaged in a political standoff, organizing and mobilizing large segments to thwart the flood of institutional reforms proposed by the right-wing parliamentary majority. This was a war on the streets and a war of position, empowered by the Ashkenazi liberal security elite’s influence throughout the courts, the army, and bureaucracy. For the first time, this standoff extended to the military, with concrete threats from Israeli air force pilots, primarily drawn from the ranks of Israel’s Ashkenazi elite, to resign from service. Alongside this civil and military standoff, Israel faces numerous internal socio-economic and political challenges: the battle over the role of religion in the state, the perpetual conflict with the Haredim (Ultra-Orthodox Jews) population, which continues to safeguard its status as a group subsidized by the state while rejecting military conscription. The future of Israel’s relations with the Palestinians is not a decisive point of contention. The difference between these two poles is also apparent in the fighting in Gaza. Most massacres committed in Gaza were the result and consequences of Israel’s air force being dominated by the Ashkenazi liberal segment of Israeli society, while those fighting on the ground in combat units largely hail from the settlements of the West Bank and Israel’s working-class population of Sephardic Jews, etc. Of course, this is a bit simplistic, but it is also to an extent true. The first group kills more and destroys more but from a safe distance, the other kills in close combat and is at least exposed to the possibility of being killed. One group is unapologetic and showcases its pleasure in killing; the other group kills in silence but kills more and from a distance.

Are there some Israelis against the war? Or Israelis who support territorial pragmatism and compromise? There are. However, they are a small and dispersed minority with no real power in Israeli society. They will discursively reject some of the excesses of their military policies; however, they will concede that it remains a “necessary evil,” especially at times when the threat of decolonization looms. As you have already noted in your question, there is that moment when the settler society appears unified in their

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exalting of the indigenous as a despicable and diabolical enemy. These are the moments when these lines of differentiation are erased, and when tribal, ethnic, and as loose as it might be, religious affiliations come to the fore. Of course, traumatic events such as October 7th in the immediate sense place the existential question to the fore, reminding people of what they stand to lose but also reminding them of the vulnerability of the enterprise they invested their lives in building and securing. It strengthens the resolve and at the same time exposes the rot in the center of Israeli society.

But it is also important to outline something else within Zionism; it is its need for an enemy as a threshold on which it can sustain its spatial expansion and from whom it seeks recognition of its victory and its righteousness. Palestinians are, for now, vanishing mediators that are destined for elimination but not before they recognize the righteousness of the Zionist cause and legitimize the Zionist claim on Palestine. In other words, “just before they kill you, they need you to utter the words of recognition.”

The current war is traumatic in every sense of the word for the Zionist ethos, traumatic since it exposed the vulnerability at the heart of the militaristic ethos, and revealed the vulnerability on a register that exceeds Israel’s own discursive and psychological exhalation of “existential anxiety.” In many ways, it was as if a paranoid met his worst fears. This moment transformed Israeli society into one that desires vengeance, is willing to sacrifice, and is invested in the conscious discourse of its right-wing pole. Almost everyone became Itamar Ben-Gvir.¹² The response that Israelis desired was to unleash its killing machine. The most popular songs in Israel are about drunken power, about the uninhibited employment of weapons. Instead of carrying a weapon as a marker of dominance, Israeli society insisted on its use, showing little differentiation among its variously conflicting tribes.

The only scant fault line pertains to the families of those imprisoned by the Palestinian resistance. Will Israel endure in its tradition of paying any price for those who fall prisoners in the hands of Palestinian and Arab resistances, or will it break the social pact with its citizens and im-

¹² Itamar Ben-Gvir is a religious Zionist leader who has served as the Minister of National Security since 2022. Ben-Gvir heads the Jewish Power party (Otzma Yehudit) and lives in the illegal settler colony of Kiryat Arba in Hebron in the West Bank. His political brand emphasizes the need to eliminate the Palestinians by forced expulsion from Palestine.

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munize itself to such negotiated prisoner exchanges? The implications of these choices are expressed in the priorities among its political formations, with the right-wing calling not to accede to such negotiated outcomes and treating the Israelis imprisoned as “already killed.” The other pole fears such treatment will slowly and surely weaken the attractive pole of Israel as an economic, social, and political bastion that does everything in its power to protect its settlers both collectively and individually, as a state that can both attract new settlers and maintain its current ones. But also, this liberal pole is responsive to the cries of protesters from the families of the imprisoned who feel betrayed by the state on multiple fronts: its inability to prevent the offensive attack, its killing of some of the imprisoned in Gaza, and its prioritization (or lack thereof) of the return of those imprisoned.

The second fault line relates to who will be ultimately responsible for October 7th. The only “day after” on the mind of most Israeli politicians and security elites relates to this reckoning. Who will fall on their sword, who will be blamed for the events, and who will survive the coming storm? Of course, this fault line is also tied to the struggles over Israel’s future among its warring factions. For now, the enmity with the Palestinians is convenient. It always allows the perpetuation of the war without reckoning. It is also an attempt by Israel to reconstitute itself as a nation still capable of producing heroes. Ultimately, the ferociousness of the internal rift will be exacerbated by this war, especially if Israel emerges bloodied with significant losses on diplomatic, legal, economic, and military fronts. The depth, breadth, and scope of this reckoning remain contingent on the outcomes of the current war, and the perceptions of Israelis of their success and failures, of having met limits, or have exceeded expectations. However, even in failure, a sinking ship with nuclear weapons is also dangerous.

Material: Although Palestinians according to the Zionist narrative are, as you put it, “vanishing mediators that are destined for elimination,” the long history of anti-colonial resistance demonstrates that such an elimination is being stymied and hopefully will never come to fruition. But it is obviously the case that day-to-day existence for Palestinians who live under Israeli domination is always subjected to this colonial destiny of elimination. Aside from those living in Gaza whose daily existence is now being subjected to open genocidal warfare, what is the phenomenological

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existence for most Palestinians—what are some common thoughts, feelings, beliefs—living in the West Bank and in so-called “Israel proper?” In your essay *Crosshairs* you wrote eloquently about the sense of feeling hunted, the subordination of life to “math and machine”—similar to what Achille Mbembe referred to as “vertical sovereignty” in his famous essay on necropolitics¹³—but you also spoke of it generating a form of resistance that affirmed existence. And indeed, despite the unfolding genocide in Gaza, during this interview you have demonstrated a resistant hope in the face of annihilation. Is that kind of hope common?

Abdaljawad Omar: The inquiry into hope, its dissection, the cutting open of that peculiar, affective yearning for liberation, or even its positioning in the concrete, straddles the Palestinian condition as a pathological undercurrent. Mahmoud Darwish placed it perfectly when he said, “*We Palestinians suffer from an incurable disease called hope.*”

In considering hope as an affliction or a disease, as a symptomatic trace, we are also entangling ourselves in the effects born from the enduring and unyielding imperial and colonial onslaught upon Palestine. To categorize this hope as pathological is to position it at the epicenter, not merely as a condition but as a testament to a broader, suffocating reality. It’s to understand, perhaps with a disconcerting clarity, its echo in the utterances of those who oppose Palestinian existence, those who slip, revealingly, into acknowledging “ *Hamas is an idea*”—a phrase that inadvertently grants substance to the presence of hope in the very condition of possibility that the appearance of resistance permits. The Colonial machinery sees in “hope” its primary enemy, for hope transforms the “Good Arab” in its terminology, into the defiant, transgressive Arab, to the “Bad Arab.”

One could posit that the large literature, intellectual musings, and political discourses swirling around the question of Palestine, especially within Palestine, find their gravitas around the notion of “hope.” It’s a space where justifiable beliefs in alternative horizons are not just fostered but clung to. Hope, in this schema, assumes the paradoxical guise of a beloved

¹³ See Achille Mbembe’s *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019). For Mbembe, necropolitics (the political power to decide who lives and who dies) result in *death worlds* where entire populations are treated as the living dead. Mbembe argued that Gaza was one such death world, subjected to the necropolitics of the Zionist settler state.

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antagonist—loathing it for the very reason that ensnares you in its tempting, yet elusive, embrace. I am not sure in this sense that I have ever had a discussion—political, intellectual, or even day-to-day—where hope was not its absent center. Indeed, I do not think I have written anything that did not emanate from this hopeless clinging to hope.

However, hope, like all the affective textures that weave through Palestinian existence, carries with it the potential for peril; to rephrase, it can also manifest as a hallucinatory veneer, a tapestry of wishful thinking. Emile Habibi, the Palestinian novelist from that inaugural cohort of Political and literary leaders who lingered in Palestine post-Nakba, articulated in his lauded novel, *The Secret Life of Saeed*, an emotional state he dubbed the “pessoptimist,” embodying the knitted cobwebs of pessimism and optimism. The intertwining of optimism and pessimism is articulated in his narrative, blurring the boundaries to such an extent that they meld into a singular term. This neologism, “pessoptimist,” fuses these distinct dispositions, erasing the gap, obfuscating the divide, and rendering both undifferentiated. A pessoptimist occupies neither the joyful land of the optimists nor the dystopian realm of the pessimists, existing in a space that is neither wholly here nor there, neither entirely conquered nor entirely triumphant.

Edward Said once proclaimed while placing his humanist, secular, and universalist gaze, that Palestinian nationalism as a “self-defensive nationalism” appears as a necessity. The ontological cut of the Palestinian subject lies in the very encounter with colonialism, and for Said, liberation would also ultimately signify the end of the “Palestinian,” the dissolution of this identity. Said was hoping for the moment in time when Palestinians efface the need to identify with Palestine.

We can also invert this proposition, can a Palestinian subject exist without hope? I think that would be equivalent to a suicidal gesture, a self-effacement, the metamorphosis to a life without hope. We can see this gesture today in the politics of Mahmoud Abbas and his comprador cohort, where the emphasis is placed on the colossal wall of reality. A wall without windows or doors, without narrative or fantasy. A wall built from the ruins of unmet expectations and forgone revolution, and a wall that marks this desire to break free from hope, by perpetuating and eternalizing defeat. In this political register, the delinking from hope is an attempt to

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annihilate the “Palestinian subject” without the burden of resistance. In Said, liberation is the condition of possibility for thinking about ourselves beyond Palestine. For Abbas, the persistence of colonialism is the acting force to efface the Palestinian subject, to annihilate the Palestinian before his physical annihilation. One could also claim that these are the two primary political registers within Palestine, registers that co-exist in the secret life of all Palestinians.

Finally, to crack open the wall both figuratively and materially was the core of the October 7th offensive maneuver. Within this maneuver is an endeavor to test, to tease out one of the fundamental questions that Palestinians ask, a question that Kant raised in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; “For What May I Hope?” Hope is common, more common than the hopeless in Palestine themselves at times admit.

Material: Although that very thoughtful analysis of hope would be a good place to end, we just want to ask you one final question to expand the scope to the international dimension. As you know, the Palestinian struggle has a long history of internationalism. There was a time when it was plugged into a worldwide anti-imperialist movement where its most advanced organizations were connected to the actions of militants and revolutionaries, not just in the region, but throughout the world. In the 1960s and 1970s organizations such as the Japanese Red Army and the Red Army Faction would train with the PLO and carry out joint actions. The so-called Blekingegade Gang in Denmark would rob banks and use the money to provide material support for the PFLP. These examples, and many others, speak to a period of time that no longer exists—largely because of the collapse of the cold war balance of power. The fact that Germany is currently hunting down and arresting the remaining fugitives of the RAF, while prosecuting all pro-Palestinian activity, in some ways represents the ghost of that period. But meanwhile we have witnessed the reemergence of people’s wars, the strongest ones right now being those carried out by the Communist Party of the Philippines and the Communist Party of India (Maoist). What are your thoughts about the possibility of a new anti-imperialist internationalism beyond the solidarity of militant factions in the region (i.e., Yemen, Lebanon)? While it is true that the Palestinian struggle has much to teach the world, is it

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possible that it can also learn from these other struggles or at least conceptualize ways for mutual solidarity?

Abdaljawad Omar: Solidarity has undergone radical reframing in the context of Palestine’s post-Oslo epoch. The nature, character, and modes of practice that have come to define the notion of solidarity are both starkly disembodied and highly conflictive. The focus of the vast majority of Palestinian political and civil society is on the Global North. This form of solidarity has come to be dominated by conceptual lexicons that for instance analogize the Palestinian issue by linking it to apartheid or situate it as a human rights issue that is understood through a liberal-internationalist vocabulary. This reality produced new forms of activism, of an activist *franca-lingua* and new political subjectivities that center on “human rights.” Much of the current moment speaks to four dominant forms of practices: a politics of appeal, countering Zionist propaganda, limited political organizing and actions, and a war of positions (universities, editorial collectives, media, book industry, churches, etc.), and the persistence of the Palestinian BDS movement. It also includes some, although limited, moves the nation-states like South Africa have made to provide more protection for Palestinians by employing the legal mechanisms available to them in the international legal system.

We could discuss at length why this moment led to the dissolution of an anti-colonial and anti-imperial coalition—the Soviet Union collapse, the dissipation of the organized left in the West, and the defeat of the Palestinian revolution in Beirut. However, it must also be stated outright that much of the problem stems from Palestinian political dispositions. These politics have either played a fundamental role in the regional imperialist alliance system (current form of PLO) or have chosen to elevate its cultural tradition and the notions of *umma*, the universalism of Islam, in its political discourse and practices (Hamas). Thus far, the new forces leading the Palestinian resistance—Hamas and Islamic Jihad—have not been able to produce an effective political and ideological imagination outside the boundaries of the *umma*. The frail Palestinian left remains an intellectual and ideological force but has largely abandoned the concept of “people’s war,” at least on the level of practice. This issue has a complex history, and exploring it would require considerable space. Not to make the answer

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simple, but the absence of an organized left and the foreclosure of such possibilities by Islamist forces create this lack. Moreover, the limited success of some anticolonial movements across the global south through flag independence has also meant that Palestinians have lost the ground on which much of the complex network of alliances was built in the 1960s and 1970s. These movements took control over state institutions and many became embroiled in the international liberal order.

Moreover, solidarity with Palestine reflects the emergence of post-colonial temporality amid an ongoing settler-colonial enterprise; it is fuzzy, ill-defined, malleable, and transitory. Solidarity has come to mean everything and nothing, designating practices, sentiments, and forms of action that are widely disparate and contain many conflicting stances: political, ideological, and phantasmic. I sometimes feel Palestine has become an empty signifier on which many project their own revolutionary fantasies or their own political dispositions.

The 1960s and '70s witnessed the build-up of solidarity in action and praxis; it was based on jointly testing the power of disrupting the world order with a wide variety of political formations, largely drawn from the leftist revolutionary tradition. The Palestinian revolution was a pioneer in strategies like airplane piracy and supporting active radical groups aimed at societal and political transformations. Moreover, this era significantly impacted the imperial order in societies of the global north. The globe was seen as their field of action, with limitations only based on the specific countries' stances on the Palestinian cause. At that particular moment, the idea of retribution in a world that shunned Palestinians and facilitated their ethnic cleansing was central. But also, it was highly influenced by a left that was still energetic, organized, and by many measures was not defeated.

The past should serve as a signpost, not merely as a nostalgic exercise or a romanticization of a bygone era. We have spoken here many times about the concrete, analyzing the concrete, and operating from the concrete. However, a concrete analysis that delimits Palestine to its geography, to its place, would end up eschewing not only the interconnections between Palestine as a laboratory for empire, as a test case in counterinsurgency, a dissected geography for the development of surveillance technologies, but

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also in Palestine as hope for other struggles and other struggles as a hope for Palestine.

This requires a pedagogy that also recognizes other struggles and disruptive moments as symptoms of the global order. Seeing others' struggles and learning from them has been and remains a fundamental approach for Palestinian revolutionaries. Learning from the praxis of others was never truly absent; it was always seen as necessary, as understanding how others have accumulated, managed, and produced counter-power helps forge a nuanced understanding of the successes and failures of specific struggles. It also helps broaden the horizon of thinking liberation, not just as the liberation of particularities but as the liberation of the whole. We must think beyond national boundaries that sometimes seem to limit our field of action and, indeed, our field of thought. This is why to me Palestine is not my issue or a Palestinian issue. Neither is any issue where an oppressive machinery operates, particularly the machinery that defines and delimits our current global economic and political order. Today, many in the world are stating outright, “I am a Palestinian too.” But we are also the refugees crossing the Mediterranean, the laborers of rural Asian societies, the struggle in India and the Philippines, the cries of all those agonized from the world that remains not theirs, a world that also remains not ours.

The Working of the Neo- Colonial Mind

K. Murali (Ajith)

“That the 1991 reforms marked a major watershed in India’s economic history is surely beyond argument. No waiting list for cars and scooters, no special license for securing foreign exchange for studying abroad, no gold smuggling and no more the dread of customs officers at the airports.”

“The world has changed substantially since the 1990s and so has India. The country is now carving a niche in the global markets which has so far been dominated by developed countries.”

These quotes were taken from issues of the *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW).¹ The consumerist glee seen in the first is of someone wholly supportive of the neoliberal turn taken by the Indian State in 1991. Rajeev

¹ Rajiv Kumar, “Making Reform Work for the People,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 51, no. 19 and Ramdas Rupavath, “Confronting Everyday Humiliation: Response from an Adivasi,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 51, no. 31.

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Kumar (presently the vice-chair of the NITI)² had some concerns about the inequality that accompanied it. Still, he believed that this could be handled and resolved, continuing with a neoliberal agenda adjusted to India. Greater integration with the world economy was declared as a “major achievement.” Above all, he was quite certain that the reforms had a very large dose of indigenous inputs. He claims that they were based on domestic research and advocacy.

The second quote is from someone addressing a very different concern. Ramdas Rupavath was writing about the discrimination and humiliation suffered by *Dalit* and *Adivasi* students in institutes of higher education. Well aware of the social, economic roots of the prejudices they are victims of, he squarely targeted the *varna*/caste system as anti-social and anti-national. He also pointed out that opportunities became even more unequal and uncertain post-liberalization. The fruits of its growth went to a tiny rich class.

Coming from distinctly different spaces, Kumar and Rupavath articulate sharply different concerns. Yet, as seen in these quotes, both are convinced about one thing—India has “arrived” on the world stage. Indeed, this is a dominant theme among a great majority of the middle class. And that includes many otherwise critical of the state of affairs in the country. It is almost an article of faith, an unquestionable frame of reference. It was also the overriding theme of most of the articles published in newspapers and magazines marking the 25th anniversary of the 1991 reforms. Many of them made it a point to deny any foreign compulsion and insisted on their indigenous origins.

Montek Singh Ahluwalia’s article is symptomatic of this viewpoint. Refuting allegations that these reforms were imposed by the IMF, he writes:

This completely ignores the fact that there was a home-grown process of rethinking on economic policy that had been underway and pointed towards many changes. These changes certainly formed part of the conditionality of the IMF’s assistance, because the IMF’s supposed to lend only in situations where the government has a credible adjustment programme. The IMF obviously

² The NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) is a policy think tank of the Government of India.

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approved the reforms in that sense, but that is not the same thing as saying it dictated the contents.³

He then goes on to enumerate various proposals and initiatives, beginning from the late 1970s onwards, aimed at changing economic policy. They culminated in a paper he authored in 1990. Its contents mostly anticipated the reforms of 1991. Ahluwalia cites the discussion of this paper in a Government of India (GOI) Committee of Secretaries as proof of these proposals “. . .being considered internally, well before any IMF arrangements was contemplated.”

We need not dispute this account given by a leading architect of the 1990 reforms. But does it really settle the matter? Can the mere fact of a policy paper being discussed by some GOI Secretaries or the policy shift carried out since the 1990s determine that the reforms were of internal origin? Ahluwalia supplies the answer in his unwitting admission: the policy changes proposed by the Narasimha Rao Government were precisely those that formed the conditionalities of the IMF loan. They were directed towards ensuring structural adjustments suited to the neo-liberal agenda. They were not advisory in nature. A country seeking IMF assistance could not amend or reject them. They were inviolable—an imposition. That is the crux of the matter. It stands confirmed by the fact that almost all Third World countries had to adopt similar policy shifts during that period.⁴

An imposition need not take the form of an explicit diktat. It could well be achieved through the loan seeking government pre-indicating willingness to fulfil IMF conditions. Considering that the prior acceptance of a structural adjustment program was a must, it would make eminent sense for a desperate government to declare its compliance well in advance. Keep in mind that while the “balance of payment” crisis was brought to quick maturation by the first Gulf War, the motion towards it was already evident by the late 1980s. Therefore, the fact that the policy shift was pro-

³ Montek S. Ahluwalia, “The 1990s Reforms: How Home Grown Were They?” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 51, no. 29, 39.

⁴ Between 1982 and 1990 the number of “upper tranche” loans with at least 11 conditionalities grew from 5 to 60%. WB structural adjustment loans went up from 3 to 25% in 1981–1996. (*Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 52, no. 33, note 6, 92.)

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posed and debated upon even before approaching the IMF really doesn't prove Ahluwalia's claim.

The collapse of the Soviet Union had a direct impact on the Indian economy. It severely weakened the Indian ruling class. They had to fall in line with the "Washington Consensus" and accept the neoliberal "globalization, privatization and liberalization" (GPL) agenda promoted by the US, now the sole superpower. Whether as an IMF conditionality or not, structural adjustments to give free play to neoliberal policies were inevitable. Later, structural adjustments incorporating the GPL agenda, became a permanent, inviolable condition, an inseparable part of the Indian economy (and of other Third World economies) through the 1993 GATT Agreement and the World Trade Organization's (WTO) directives.

All of this is long since public knowledge. Why do Ahluwalia and Kumar then persist in insisting on the "domestic pedigree" of the 1991 reforms? Theirs is not an attempt at covering up. No, they wholeheartedly believe it, in full view of the facts. And that makes it worth probing further.

What immediately strikes one is the blurring of the distinction between the internal and external. There has been a continuous exchange of technocrats and academicians between the GOI (and various Indian institutions) and imperialist agencies like the World Bank, IMF, and Asian Development Bank (ADB). This became particularly noticeable from the 1980s onwards. Manmohan Singh, Ahluwalia himself, Raghuram Rajan, Arvind Subramanian, Arvind Panagariya, and Urjit Patel—these are some of the recent examples.

Those who serve at the IMF and similar agencies are inevitably conditioned by the current set of ideas or policy framework being prescribed by them. When these technocrats come back to occupy key positions in GOI and articulate policy, they are invariably guided, inspired by the thinking they had imbibed and argued for while working in those imperialist agencies. Kumar's claim about the "Indian origin" of the reforms brings this out very well. His justification is that researchers "well versed in the Indian ground realities"⁵ had presented reform measures in a "readily comprehensible form" to the political leadership and other policy makers well before the formal acceptance of IMF conditionalities. Kumar added a note to his article to prove this. It informs us about a study prepared by

⁵ Kumar, 35.

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a team, including himself, for the ADB in 1989. In his words, “It is noteworthy that many of these measures [i.e., those proposed in the study] were replicated in the structural reforms matrix presented by the IMF. . .” as conditionality for its loan.

There is nothing surprising about this “replication.” After all the ADB is a key player among imperialist agencies. Going by the information Kumar provides, there is also nothing surprising about his considering an external, foreign, set of ideas as “internally” generated. For people like him and Ahluwalia this only appears as a seamless flow of ideas, which they share and willingly act upon. For them there is nothing separating the indigenous from the foreign in this matter.

This approach is by no means restricted to IMF-WB returnees. A great many academicians and all top-level administrators are tutored or directly trained in imperialist thinking. Quite naturally enough, the contribution they make to governance and economic policies remains within the framework of imperialist thought. Nothing is imposed. The external is internalized. Its articulation becomes country specific without even a trace of its foreign origins.

Whether they be foreign returnees or home-based ones, consideration of the Indian economy as one enmeshed (not integrated) in the global imperialist system is simply missing. This stands in sharp contrast to the thinking of the local elites during the colonial period. They could not but be acutely aware of British India’s dependent status and its debilitating consequences. The British origins and biases of policies executed by the colonial administration were all too plain. Hence, even while remaining loyal subjects of the British empire, some among them produced weighty studies exposing the plunder of the imperial metropolis and expressing local interests in opposition to metropolitan capital.

The transfer of power in 1947 promoted a transition from this mindset to a new one. To get an idea of this transformation and the characteristics of the new consciousness, we must first get acquainted with the colonial mind, the mind of the elite colonial subject. Awestruck by the political and economic might of the colonial power and grieving one’s own backwardness—such was its main character. The local elites were eager to imitate the colonial masters in all public spheres of their lives. The metropolis was acclaimed as the model to aspire to. Yet, the colo-

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nial mind was also quite disgruntled. Even the richest, even those with royal lineage or those who had demonstrated academic acumen were still treated as inferior “locals” by colonial masters. They remained lesser subjects compared to those in colonies populated by “whites.” They were denied dominion status. Dissatisfaction engendered by such discrimination, coupled with the drain of wealth, crystalized over time into political opposition expressed as anti-colonialism. The Indian National Congress was its main articulator and vehicle.

For the new rulers who came to power in 1947 and their ideologues, independence was nothing more than the ending of colonial rule. Hence they sincerely believed that they were engaged in building an independent country. This was not simply a false image meant to deceive the people. They were quite convinced about its feasibility. By 1947 an elite intellectual stratum had taken form. It was composed of elements from the comprador, feudal, and upper middle classes. They became the formulators and executors of economic measures adopted by the new state. A good many were driven by a zeal to build an India capable of taking a prominent role in the world arena. Brahmanist claims about a glorious past and a desire to “retake” it were intertwined with their ambitions. Getting rid of economic backwardness was their priority. But their very class nature ruled out radical reforms in agriculture and other spheres. Considering the building of an industrial base as a necessary condition and constrained by paucity of capital and technology, they eagerly sought “foreign aid.”

Initially, some imperialist powers like the US were opposed to their plans. The new rulers succeeded in crossing this obstacle by relying on other powers. The whole experience and similar instances in other fields went to further strengthen the illusion of independence. Sharp contradictions between the capitalist bloc and the erstwhile socialist camp and later between the two superpower blocs (led by US and the erstwhile Soviet social imperialism) allowed room for their maneuvering and bargaining.

The uppermost strata were well aware of India’s actual dependent position in the world order. Their immediate dealings with the world powers repeatedly underlined this real status, especially during recurring crisis. But it was realized as limits on their independence, not as limitations inherent to it. The middle class, distant from such experiences, was however firmly convinced of India’s “importance” in world affairs as an indepen-

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dent country. It was quite taken in by ruling class hype. Such are the main characteristics of the neo-colonial mind in India. It mainly manifests as a sense of independence, even while the country remains dependent.

Formal independence of erstwhile colonies is an essential feature, a vital requirement of neo-colonialism. That distinguishes it from colonialism. Instead of direct control exercised in the political sphere under colonialism, indirect control becomes the norm. This emerges from the very trajectory, the origins and evolution of neo-colonialism. Principally, it did not come from the internal economic dynamism of imperialism. Rather, it was a political response, something forced on it by the tide of anti-colonial and national liberation struggles. In countries like China this high tide was expressed as a revolution challenging the imperialist order. For imperialism, the success of the new global architecture hinged on the degree to which the tide of revolt could be turned back. The semblance of independence in former colonies thus became crucial for the emerging neo-colonial world order. The imperialist powers had to concede this, even if grudgingly.

Even then they tried to retain their direct control in the economic sphere. This was true of the US too, which was promoting “decolonization” as a stratagem to weaken major colonial powers like Britain and France. Wherever possible, imperialism tried to prevent any development that would weaken its direct economic grip. It sought to retain existing forms of exploitation and plunder of oppressed nations. This impacted the interests of the new rulers in the neo-colonies. They were keen on building and strengthening their own base, in order to be in a better position to bargain. This tug of interests inevitably became a prominent aspect of the relations between imperialist powers and Third World ruling classes. The shift to indirect control of the economies of semi-feudal, semi-colonial countries under neo-colonialism took place over time. Primarily, it was enabled by the perfection of new means for imperialist penetration, such as tied aid, transfer of obsolete technology, and conditional loans from imperialist agencies during periods of crisis.

The new ruling classes remained subservient to imperialism as a whole. Yet, the legitimacy of their rule, their ideological hegemony, ultimately rested on the claim of heading an independent country. Wherever the communists or other revolutionary forces succeeded in gaining leadership of the struggle against the colonial power, they took it forward as a broad

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anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle. This forced the compradors and feudal classes in those countries to increasingly reveal their true nature as servitors of imperialism. In situations where revolutionary forces failed to gain leadership and power was transferred to the exploiting classes, they presented themselves as champions of independence. Having cornered the leadership of the struggle during the colonial period, they could conceal their nature and appear as genuine leaders of a quest to consolidate independence and achieve development. This appeared as a continuation of their leading role in the anti-colonial struggle.

The bolstering and perfecting of the semblance of independence in both the political and economic realms was vital for the new ruling classes. The backing away of imperialism from retaining direct control over neo-colonial economies and the fleshing out of neo-colonialism, was however mainly realized as responses to struggles of the masses—that is, through the working out of the contradiction between imperialism and oppressed nations and people. Though the contradictions between Third World ruling classes and imperialist powers also had a role in this, it was secondary. These remained essentially non-antagonistic within the imperialist system. The opposition expressed by any Third World state was always with one or the other imperialist power or bloc. It was never against the imperialist system as such. The limits of anti-colonial struggle, a struggle that had equated independence to the ending of colonial rule, was thus revealed. For the comprador and feudal classes, that limit was inherent in their class character. But for the classes that rallied under their leadership and thus failed to go beyond anti-colonialism, it was an unconscious internalization of comprador thought. It was also a process through which they were co-opted into the hegemonic consensus being forged by the rulers-to-be. They remained trapped in a false consciousness that presented dependence as independence.

Those lacking in a consistent anti-imperialist stand inevitably failed to break away from imperialist thinking. That frame of thought and the policies it generated appeared to them as value-free universal principles. Imperialism's active role in shaping and influencing the academic world of neo-colonies complemented and strengthened the disguised subservience it spawned. Hence, for the neo-colonial mind, measures of imperialist control and exploitation are never seen as external impositions. They are

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considered as arising from the internal dynamics of the country, necessitated by its development quest. The neo-colonial mind is blind to the imperialist system in which the country is enmeshed. With their vision blocked from seeing the real world by the false consciousness of independence and its articulation as narrow nationalism, the neo-colonial intellectual/technocrat proposes and pursues policies that heighten imperialism's grip ever more; all the while believing that they will strengthen the country. Participation in neo-colonial bodies like the IMF, WB, G-20 and so on is seen as a matter of self-willed choice and recognition of one's country's standing.

It is not the case that the neo-colonial subjects have no contradiction with imperialism. We earlier saw the differentiation within this. There is the antagonistic contradiction the oppressed people have with the imperialist system. And there are also the non-antagonistic contradictions Third World ruling classes have with this or that imperialist power. Consequently, the manner in which these contradictions are grasped varies. For the ruling classes, bred and shaped by imperialism, this is a matter of bargaining. That is not how it is experienced by other classes such as the national bourgeoisie, middle class, peasantry, and workers. Yet, to the extent they are under the sway of ruling-class hegemonic consensus, the neo-colonial mind dominates. Apparent similarity is seen between their understanding of the country's position in the world, world events, and that of the ruling classes. The difference lies in their patriotism, as opposed to the compradorism of the rulers. However, that patriotism fails in its subjective desire to be independent when it remains trapped in the neo-colonial frame of thought. In the final analysis it ends up strengthening the ruling class's hegemonic consensus and dependence on the imperialist system. This is true even when it is expressed in the form of militant nationalism.

An instance of this dynamism that readily comes to mind is the Indira Gandhi government's stand-off with the US in 1971 on the Bangladesh issue. Despite facing threatening moves by the US, the Indian government stuck to its plan to intervene in the Bangladesh liberation war and ensure the break-up of Pakistan. The ruling classes celebrated it as proof of India's independent foreign policy and standing in the world. This stance and India's victory in the 1971 war were hailed by the broad masses with great fervor. In the midst of this what went unnoticed was the backing given by the erstwhile Soviet social imperialism and its tightening grip through the

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Indo-Soviet Treaty. Thus the patriotism of the masses became a means of legitimizing greater subservience to social imperialism and, through it, to the imperialist system as a whole.

Having noted some of the salient features of the neo-colonial mind, we shall now return to the matter of the 1991 policy shift. The occasion of the 25th anniversary has been used by some intellectuals to grieve the years “lost” preceding that shift. A rather simplistic lesson is drawn by comparing the rapid growth of South East Asian countries in that period with the slow pace seen in India. It is argued that these countries “succeeded” because they had opened up to foreign capital quite early and boosted exports. India, on the contrary, remained a closed economy insisting on “import substitution.” Note that the position of these countries in the post-World War 2 political and economic architecture of the imperialist system simply does not figure in this argument. When that is taken into consideration, the key role played by the strategic moves of the US in their growth would stand out.

The importance given by the US to these countries was closely related to its strategy of containing the impact of Socialist China and growing national liberation struggles. The Vietnam War, pitting a communist-led people’s war against the US and allies, soon turned into a focal point. Countries like Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, and South Korea became even more important for the US. This was the global context enabling and shaping the economies of these countries through “export-led growth.” Yet, for all that, they remained links in the imperialist value-commodity chain, as component suppliers to transnational corporates. In recent decades, a few monopolies from these countries have emerged as significant players in consumer goods production. But then, so too have Indian corporates. Besides, import substitution was by no means unique to India. In its heyday, it was standard policy in a number of Third World countries, particularly the bigger ones. Their common inspiration was a neo-colonial development model then favored by some imperialist circles. It was seen as a means to deepen imperialist penetration through project-tied loans and limited export of obsolete technology. Whether “export-led” or “import-substituted” they ultimately contributed to a strengthening of dependence. The Indian neo-colonial mind is bitter about having been denied the opportunity to indulge in consumerist orgies along with its fellows in

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South East Asian countries. In doing so it blinds itself to the hollowness of those economies, sharply exposed in the crisis that hit them in the late 1990s. Big corporates like Daewoo simply collapsed. A huge chunk of locally owned industrial assets was snatched up for a trifle by imperialist corporates. Their dependence on imperialism stood out in all its ugliness.

Incidentally, the Indian economy escaped the worst of the 2007 global financial crisis precisely because it had not yet opened up to full capital convertibility. This was something the IMF and local technocrats had insistently demanded. But, just around the time the clamor to fully open up capital markets reached a high pitch, the South East Asian “Tigers” started collapsing. Given their “openness” they were unable to control capital flight. It was this turn, rather than the prudence of this or that RBI Governor, that delayed full capital convertibility. And that turned out to be quite beneficial when the 2007 crisis hit the world.

The neo-colonial mind is still stuck in a time warp lamenting the slow pace of “opening up.” Meanwhile, an influential and growing section in imperialist ruling circles and its agencies have moved on. Full capital convertibility is seen by them as a major risk. It is no longer advised. The sharp rise in inequality following implementation of GPL policies is recognized as a serious destabilizing factor. The neo-liberal policy set is being amended. A trend arguing for this had emerged by the late 1990s and early 2000 with calls for “globalization with a human face” and “inclusive government.” What is significant is the broader respectability this has gained over the years in the IMF-WB officialdom and its promotion through their official journals.⁶ Even then, the main thrust of the neo-liberal agenda still retains its venomous bite. Conditions imposed on Greece for a bailout loan are a sharp reminder.

The slowdown of reforms during the UPA rule and attempts to “revive” it under the NDA-2 has been a prominent theme in neo-colonial academic political circles.⁷ There certainly was a “slowdown.” Objective factors underlay it. By the late 1990s and early years of 2000s, broad mass struggle

⁶ Pritam Singh, “IMF’s Auto critique of neo-liberalism?” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 51, no. 32. An article in the IMF’s official magazine has admitted that “the claim that neo-liberalism always contributed to economic growth is difficult to sustain,” 39.

⁷ United Progressive Alliance (UPA) is a coalition of political parties led by the Indian National Congress. National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is the one led by the Bharathiya Janata Party (BJP). The NDA is ruling since 2014.

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broke out in many parts of the country. They were mainly focused on the forced displacement of peasants and *Adivasis* from their lands for the sake of multinational-Indian corporate projects and Special Economic Zones. The ruling classes had to take this into account, particularly because they aided the growth and spread of the Maoist movement in some regions. Taking a cue from imperialist circles, and lessons from the miserable defeat of NDA-I in 2004, the UPA started parroting “globalization with a human face.” It initiated reformist programs like MNREGA and adopted new acts meant to blunt struggles from below.⁸ The aggressive promotion of GPL was held back to some extent.

As usual, the neo-colonial mind grasps this as its own product. The conclusion that “India is not suited to the application of the Washington Consensus” is presented as original thought “emerging from Indian reality.”⁹ Imperialist finance capital is renamed by some as “global capital.” Defying all indicators of deepening dependency, it is even claimed that global capitalism “has been created” within India!¹⁰

It is not that those who state such views are unaware of policy rethinking taking place in imperialist circles. They consider this merely an enabling factor. The real impetus, in their view, comes from internal developments. Imperialist agencies certainly do not produce policies purely from their own thought or conditions. Political, social, and economic developments in Third World countries are under their constant observation. Sensing the mood of the broad masses is an important part of this. Comprador rulers and intellectuals are vital sources in this process; there is continuous interaction with them. But, ultimately, policy is set at the global level by imperialist thinktanks and agencies serving finance capital. The comprador, the neo-colonial mind, won't experience this as an external input. After all, they too have been part of its evolution. Yet they still are not the deciding factor for the formulation of policy. This is the crux, however incomprehensible it is to the neo-colonial mind.

⁸ MNREGA—Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act—a scheme for rural employment meant to alleviate poverty.

⁹ Kumar, 55.

¹⁰ Anjan Chakrabarti, “Indian Economy in Transition,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 51, no. 29, 64.

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Let us go back to the “slowdown-revival” theme posed and debated in neo-colonial circles. One notes a near total absence of any reference to the 2007 global crisis and the long drawn out global recession it caused. If we are to really understand what happened and is happening in our economy, this must be factored in. In the initial years of the crisis China and India (and a few other Third World countries) were able to maintain their growth and remained stable. Restrictions on capital convertibility played a major role in this. The relative stability of these economies was an important factor aiding the imperialist powers to ride out the worst years of the crisis. However, given the enmeshing of these economies in the imperialist system this could not be sustained for long. By 2010/11 the continuing recession in imperialist countries started impacting them. Furthermore, the UPA-2 got caught up in the uncertainties of its coalition politics.

A stable government that could vigorously push the GPL agenda became a pressing necessity. This underlay the all-out backing given to Modi and the BJP led NDA by the ruling classes and imperialists. The payback is now appearing as a stepped-up effort to carry out GPL. It is not just a matter of economic policies. Concerted efforts to stifle democratic protest through deploying the fascist hordes of the Sangh Parivar, the attempt to disarm the masses by fanning up narrow nationalism and a massive increase in para-military deployment in areas of struggle are all part of this step-up.

Despite all this and the haste to attract foreign capital, growth rates have kept on falling. Banking is in a mess. Fresh local investment is stagnant. Demonetization and GST have further worsened things. The biggest chunk of India’s industry is in the unorganized medium, small, and tiny sectors. They are suffering the most, along with the rural economy. The Modi government seeks the answer in a more desperate effort to attract foreign capital. Every instance of foreign capital coming in, even if it is mainly portfolio investment in the share, debt markets, is hailed as proof of the Indian economy’s strength and confidence in the present ruling dispensation.

Finance capital is flowing in, no doubt. It seeks profits from differences in interest rates by borrowing at low or zero rates in imperialist countries and investing it here to take advantage of the higher rates existing in India. The recession in imperialist countries also leads finance capital to

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seize profitable investment opportunities in countries like India that still retain some buoyancy. Thus, a few sectors like urban transportation have seen fresh foreign investment. We can see this in the race for metro networks, even in cities that still don't have proper roads. Huge amounts of finance capital, in the form of loans, are flowing in to fund these projects. They give recession-stricken rail industries in imperialist countries some reprieve. The "smart cities" project is another example of opening up new avenues for profit-seeking finance capital. It is predicated on a wholesale privatization of municipal services.

Control over finance capital is the key lever in the global imperialist system. According to a study by a research group in Switzerland, just 20 imperialist transnational financial corporates control almost all the big corporates in the world. No matter how many companies the Tatas or Ambanis buy up in imperialist countries, even if more than half of their income originates in global operations, they remain comprador midgets before these giants. The composition of India's relatively higher growth rate is itself reflective of the country's true status. It is mainly consumption driven. Industrial production does not contribute even one third.

Ramadas Rupavath has plainly gotten his facts wrong. Let alone "carving niches," India's performance in the "global marketplace" is still quite negligible. But, more than the factual error, what is most worrying is the shocking knowledge that even someone like Rupavath, who stands with the oppressed, is trapped in the discourse of the neo-colonial mind. We are forcefully reminded that an unapologetic, aggressive, anti-imperialism is by no means outdated. We need more of it, in higher doses.

(Written in October 2016 and updated in January 2018)

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The following essay was written in 2024 for this issue of *Material* and can be taken as a postscript to the above text, last printed in 2020 by Foreign Languages Press as part of a larger compilation (*Of Concepts and Methods*). It further analyzes the neo-colonial characteristics of India through the concrete example of the telecom industry, among others, juxtaposed to China.—Eds.

Evading the Neo-Colonial Trap

In an earlier essay I pointed out an important characteristic of neo-colonialism:

For the neo-colonial mind, measures of imperialist control and exploitation are never seen as external impositions. They are considered as arising from the internal dynamics of the country, necessitated by its development quest. The neo-colonial mind is blind to the imperialist system in which the country is enmeshed. (Its) . . . vision (is) blocked from seeing the real world by the false consciousness of independence and its articulation as narrow nationalism.¹

The material grounds for this is given by the very nature of neo-colonialism. Formal independence of erstwhile colonies is an essential feature for it, a vital requirement. That distinguishes it from colonialism. Instead of direct control exercised in the political sphere under colonialism, indirect control becomes the norm. Exploitation too is carried out, to the extent possible, indirectly.

Let us try to understand this by looking at the telecom sector in India. Up until the 1990s this sector was reserved for State players. A major expansion of services took place in 1980s. It was enabled and accompanied by some development in local technical capacities. That was to end after the 1990s implementation of the imperialist globalization, privatization, liberalization agenda, and telecoms were opened up to the private sector. Simultaneously, public sector entities were either sold off or weakened in a drastic manner. This initial period was also witness to massive speculation.

¹ K. Murali (Ajith), "The Working of the Neo-colonial Mind," *Of Concepts and Methods*, (Paris: Foreign Languages Press, 2020), 108.

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Some of the major players at that stage had nothing to do with telecom or even manufacture! They were real estate giants.

Unitech, one of the largest real estate companies in the country at that time, bought 22 licenses for a sum of Rs 1,651 crore in 2008. And within months it offloaded 60 per cent of its purported telecom arm's stake to Telenor (of Norway) for Rs 6,200 crore,² an appreciation of more than six times! Swan Telecom, promoted by another real estate company, DB Realty, obtained its license for Rs 1,537 crore; it immediately sold 45 per cent of its shares to Etisalat (of the UAE) for around Rs 4,200 crore. Likewise, Shyam Telecom sold shares to the Russian firm Sistema at a massive profit.”³

Quite possibly those companies were fronting for foreign companies.

This dependence was not a matter of a fledgling industry trying to get established. The comprador big bourgeoisie has always relied on imperialist capital and technology for its growth. Neo-colonialism hasn't brought about any change in this. The above-cited essay in RUPE exposes how this has operated in a modern sector like telecom.⁴ Three decades after opening up the sector to private capital, there is nothing worth showing in terms of indigenous technology or manufacturing. The only difference in recent years is the growth of a local mobile phone assembly sector. Most of it is operated for the benefit of foreign companies like Apple, Samsung, and Xiaomi. Very little apart from assembly is done in India. India still imports much of what goes into the mobile phone. When the value of these imports are corrected for, there is a net outflow of foreign exchange.⁵ From phones to towers and switching gear, each and everything is dependent on foreign technology. It continues to be dependent on foreign capital as well, even for the leading players in the telecom sector.

² 1 crore is equal to 10 million.

³ Rahul Varman, "Indian Telecom's Spectacular Rise and the Nature of Monopoly Capital in India," *RUPE*, no. 80, www.rupe-india.org, 2023, 16.

⁴ Varman, 16.

⁵ *The Wire*, "India's Mobile Phone Exports Driven by Assembly Rather Than Domestic Manufacturing: Raghuram Rajan," May 30, 2023, <https://thewire.in/government/indias-mobile-phone-exports-driven-by-assembly-rather-than-domestic-manufacturing-raghuram-rajan>.

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Take the case of the largest private operator in India, Reliance Jio, part of the larger Reliance conglomerate owned by one of India's wealthiest compradors. The parent company of Jio, Reliance Industries, floated a holding company in 2019, Jio Platforms Ltd. (JPL). Its stated purpose was control of Jio Telecom and other digital initiatives of the group. But in the very next year, a series of investments were made in JPL by big international finance and tech companies, such as Meta, Google, Qualcomm, and others. JPL raised around Rs 1.1 *lakh crore*⁶ by selling 30–32 percent of its ownership stake.⁷ The money raised was used to clear its debts, at the cost of massively strengthening foreign dependence. This is not an isolated example. ICICI is the leading private sector bank in India. More than 40 percent of its paid up capital is foreign. Axis Bank, another leading private sector bank, is 53 percent foreign owned.

This continued dependence seen in the Indian economy is often compared to that of China. Huawei, a Chinese company, is one of the world leaders in the telecom industry today. Despite severe sanctions imposed by the US, it has managed to sustain itself and advance. Massive State support is often cited to explain this. But that was possible to a great extent in India too. Its technical capacities are well demonstrated in the space industry and software. But why didn't the Indian big bourgeoisie leverage all these factors to build up an indigenous telecom industry? The answer lies in the difference in the trajectories and nature of the big bourgeoisie of both the countries.

In the case of India, we see an unbroken chain of dependence on imperialist capital and technology. CPM and CPI revisionists and their theoreticians dispute this, pointing to the years following the transfer of power by the British in 1947. This was the period during which most of the public sector factories were established. Several factories came up in both heavy and light industrial units sectors during the early decades after the transfer of power, covering most industrial sectors. According to these revisionists, the turn to foreign dependence emerged from the 1980s onwards and became dominant in the next decade with globalization. But the industrialization seen in the early decades was not unique to India. One sees a similar phase in many other Third World countries, broadly known as

⁶ 1 *lakh crore* is equal to 1 trillion.

⁷ Varman, 16.

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“import substitution.” Industries were built up with the professed aim of replacing import of capital and consumer goods with locally manufactured ones. Actually, what was seen as local development was nothing other than neocolonialism in operation. Under “import substitution,” imperialist capital came in as “aid,” both as loans and grants, usually tied to import of machinery and technology from the imperialist country granting them. Again, most were obsolete. This pattern of industrialization did allow the building up of a modern industrial sector in oppressed countries like India as it simultaneously opened up new markets for imperialist capital and technology and deepened dependence on them.

The case of China was entirely different. It was a socialist country for nearly three decades, following the success of the new democratic revolution in 1949. This ended with the restoration of capitalism when the capitalist roaders, led by Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping, captured power through a coup in 1976 and began the process that opened up the country to imperialism. Chinese working masses were forced to labor for them at pitiable wages and in horrible working conditions similar to the sweatshops of early capitalism. This led to a huge inflow of imperialist capital and technology. China became a cog in the imperialist chain of value production, a crucial one at that. By and large, almost all the initial processing, manufacturing, and assembly of transnational monopolies took place in China. Exports, mostly by imperialist transnationals, brought in huge foreign currency earnings. The country’s foreign exchange reserves swelled to trillions.

However, these factors alone are not sufficient to explain or understand the matter. Though not exactly in the same situation, South Korea too had similar enabling factors. What really mattered was its socialist past. Unlike other Third World countries, China was completely cut off from the imperialist system during the decades of socialist rule. This allowed it to develop an indigenous scientific and technical base. Above all, it broke the slavish mentality imposed and nurtured during its semi-colonial past by imperialism. Along with these internal factors, a fortuitous world situation also helped. US imperialism was tied down by its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. That gave the Chinese ruling class a window of opportunity. Perhaps one can see something similar here to the world context that allowed the Japanese ruling class to evade colonial domination and instead become

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an imperialist power. Total domination over all aspects of society and the economy by the new Chinese bourgeoisie, as well as the ability to marshal resources in a focused manner, and a highly educated and disciplined workforce were other factors. The transformation of proletarian dictatorship led by a vanguard communist party into social fascist rule of a single, capitalist party allowed this.

If we leave out fortuitous factors, what we see from this comparison is the vital importance of severing ties from imperialism. That is the only way an oppressed country can avoid getting caught in neocolonial ties of dependence. We know of a number of countries that gained independence from colonial powers through arduous, protracted, armed struggle. Yet none succeeded in advancing to socialism and sustaining it.⁸ True, in both these countries, socialism lasted only for some decades. Even then, their experiences remain qualitatively different, as the others failed to translate national liberation into social emancipation. Moreover, within a relatively short period, the political formations/parties that led the national liberation war themselves became instrumental in allowing imperialist penetration through neocolonialism. Ultimately, what is called for is a thorough rupture from imperialism in all realms—in the economy, in social relations, in education, in culture—in everything. This rupture depends on the class character of the vanguard leading the struggle. In oppressed countries, most having a large peasant population vastly outweighing the proletariat, the ideology guiding the national liberation struggle is even more decisive. While the proletarian component of the vanguard is important, it is ideology, firm adherence to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, that ensures its class character and revolutionary orientation. Facing the vastly superior forces of imperialism demands nothing less than continuing the revolution all the way to the end, until the worldwide victory of communism. National liberation is only a first step.

⁸ In terms of countries who came out of colonial domination.

Fiction

The Universe as Vast as Our Longings¹

Benjanun Sriduangkaew

When you tell this story afterward, it's important that there is a neat structure. The names must not be too foreign—for your audience, that's hard to remember and difficult to pronounce. It would be better still to assign names from your audience's country. Monosyllables are the best. It speaks to the everyday, makes the characters everyman. This way they are relatable.

The language you deploy slips between the audience's ribs like a knife or pierces between the eyes like a bullet, and this is as much a part of you as my blood is a part of me.

The structure must proceed like so: exposition, rising action, climax. Conflict is a must, the more obviously external the better. The rest can be a little loose, but everyone likes the closure of a denouement.

* * *

¹ Originally published in the now defunct *The Jewish Mexican Literary Review* in 2017.

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They ship me out on a vessel called Queen's Glory. I'm ten and I've lost everything.

But I am not thinking in those terms; I am not thinking at all. The mind that seeks survival must by force render grief in monochrome. The ones you lose become papery faces and tattered names, and in time even those fade. When you look at your past, it is as though you're peering into cracked quartz. What you were before is separate from you, an earlier instance.

This is what they tell me: I'd be taken care of, given house and schooling, given a pair of parents. Perhaps the commanding officer believes it mercy and gently treating us salves her conscience, if she can be said to possess one. Perhaps it is merely policy—what good is a conquered nation without survivors? Some must live to commemorate defeat, and some must grow up to *thank* the defeat. That is a specific act of conquest, to make future generations glad for the scorching of our country, to make us believe that it is a boon to be uplifted from our own histories. Before long, we aspire to emulate those who turned our families into a casualty statistic. We become not people at all, but fogged mirrors.

Of all the species that comprise the conqueror genus, I've found the parent the most curious. The ones they screened for me are infertile and have been unsuccessful at applying for a birth license. I am little, look younger than I am, and something in this woman and this man turns like a key. Getting me is better than nothing at all, for these creatures who long for a small malleable thing to grow into a whole new person.

I am already my own person, but I learn to hide the fact. The conditions to survival demand that you act as though what you've left behind is an empty landscape, that you have sprung from airy wishes and clean, luminous dreams untouched by blood.

They bring me to a pastel house where beautiful moths glaze the lanterns and glassy eigenvectors cut through the air in tight schools. I am used to gardens and lakes, grass to roll on and pavilions under which to play pretend. I would be a demon-slaying hero, a cousin would be a goddess who'd reward me with a kiss or elevation to immortal sagehood. But there is no garden here, only tall pines and thorn-hedges and statues. Neverthe-

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less the Parents point out my room and say, *This is home, this is where you'll be happy, this is where we will be a family.*

If you ask me what the Parents look like, I wouldn't be able to tell you. We belong to separate genera, the Parents and I. You would not expect a tiger to distinguish between two humans with any finesse.

I'm raised on my own, at first. During this isolation period I brace myself and practice expressions for the introduction to the rest of their kin, but it never comes. The tyrant race keeps small households, each parent-child unit complete on its own. I never meet the parents of the parents. In this I have no complaint. What I meet, instead, is the creature I have been chosen to replace.

The android child looks very little like me and very little like the parents, who—but you already know what the conquerors look like. There is no need to waste words on the shape and hue of their phenotype.

(As for what I look like, I have given plenty of hints. One does not gaze into a mirror and describe. Mirrors are for narrating someone else.)

The android has a name, but it is short and inelegant, so I take to calling them Samiya after a favorite character from an epic. The name sticks. It helps that this is not a name from my own past, *Samiya* as foreign to me as it is to them and does not serve as memento of the fact that I had a self before Parents.

"I was going to be sent back to the factory," Samiya tells me over our first dinner together, just the two of us. "Or sold to the master's and mistress' neighbor, where I'd be reset and re-imprinted."

"What do *you* want?"

"I want what I'm told to want," they say placidly and eat the tasteless food. (Every dish is tasteless. The tiger's diet is vastly different from the pig's. One cannot be expected to enjoy the other's cuisine.)

It is an early lesson: that the parents might discard at any moment even the faultless child. That their caprices cannot be predicted, only worked around, as with their soldier counterparts. One could never be sure what would provoke them to shoot or to merely beat, what would get one sent to the labor camps or the crematorium, which children would be selected for my fine and fortunate fate. Much as they will insist all children were

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spared, the truth—even in my milky recollection—is otherwise, though the years will try to revise this.

Samiya is entrusted with instructing me in etiquette, how to speak and how to walk, how to sit and how to eat. Which knife to use for the appetizer, which for the main course, which for the bread and butter; how to hold a cup, how to hold a glass, how to pretend this is the life to which I was born. Once I overhear the parents discuss an operation in which I would be altered to resemble them, skull sculpted to change the structure of nose, eye sockets, cheekbones. The color of my irises, the shade of my hair. It would be for my own good, they say. But in the end it would cost too much, and the state stipend for raising me doesn't extend that far.

In the privacy of our shared bedroom, I sit with Samiya before a mirror and ask, "Do you want me to look more like you?" Their gleaming blue-black braids, their brilliant golden eyes, their smooth dusk-skin.

"No one looks like me," Samiya said slowly. "Not on this world, not on many others. The mistress saw a child like this in the footage of some distant planet and had me tailored to suit. She has a taste for the exotic—hence you, hence myself. Only she bores easily."

I think of breaking open the thin sheath of my skin, to see if hurt has altered the color of my blood, but that would trouble Samiya. I hold my palm against theirs. In that at least we are peers, the width of hand, the length of fingers. "*Would it be better for me if I looked more like the parents?*"

They lace their fingers into mine. "Not at all. It'd destroy you. I may no longer be their desired child, but I understand human psychology a great deal; that's my entire purpose. I'll do my best to keep you well, under the circumstances."

You might think all that would go over the head of a ten-year-old, but you'd be surprised at what children can grasp on instinct.

* * *

Puberty came early for me, and so by thirteen Samiya and I were shopping for their second body, a modular chassis that would grow with me rib by rib, a set of limbs that would lengthen as mine did. The female parent has reignited her interest in the exotic, and the contrast between Samiya and me pleases her: both of us so foreign and strange, as marvelous a decoration to her house as rare orchids. We occupy ourselves with the trivial.

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Should Samiya grow into their nose or should they get a narrower one? Should they lose the baby fat now or more gradually over the next few years? We consult each other; though Samiya has been re-imprinted on me, they have their own preferences.

The male parent had also decided it was time for me to attend school.

They chose one with a student body comprised of those like me, children of the annexed, a few recently, most several generations past. A different story would go like so: the school was where I found lifelong friends and belonging, perhaps I struck up an adolescent romance with a comely boy, one I later married. We would go on to adopt a child from my world, or a child that looks like Samiya, who would become the android aunt. Thus Parents would be vindicated in having created this cycle of compassion, of moving on and forgiving.

To tell that story would require a fundamental, willful misunderstanding of the human animal.

Like any herd animal, we have an intrinsic need for hierarchy. My place at school is complicated by the fact that the Parents are well-off, one of them a consul and the other an art curator. Yet inescapably I am least among least: the fact stamped on the structure of my skull, the hue of my skin. My face carries the stigma of fresh defeat and here I am to share their air, their water, their learning. I am contagion, a reminder of subjugation.

Another student, a girl adopted through the same process as mine, has her arm broken within the first week. An accident. Samiya never leaves my side, and I avoid that girl even after she somehow gets her leg broken too. (Her Parents are less prestigious, and she doesn't have an android companion licensed to defend their imprint. Samiya may be a commercial rather than military model, but still much faster than humans. Stronger.)

I do not make friends. I have no interest in boys. Among the tyrant race, there is only one permissible line of attraction.

By the next year, that girl has stopped coming to school. I make a point of never learning her name.

* * *

material

“You can be anything,” my academic advisor says on the eve of my graduation. “Your scores are excellent.”

By anything she means that I, at nineteen, can enlist in the army or take a civil examination. Legal limitations necessitate that my education terminates here.

The advisor is of conqueror blood, like most of the staff. They try to perform kindness to us, some paternalistic, some earnest. I don't ingratiate well—the aegis of parental prestige and Samiya shields me from having to—but the kind of students who broke a newcomer's limbs work hard to be teachers' favorites. Many of them will receive better references than I do, and some will go on to marry into wealth, into a semblance of citizenship.

I compare the advisor's office to the office in which I was interviewed, less than a decade past. I don't remember the questions or the soldier's face, but I remember the uniform. The uniform makes an impression the way an artillery strike does on a city. The setting is different—the interview room was gray and white while this office is radiant and refined, the skylight airy, the lavenders growing out of the advisor's skin lovely and fragrant. The school crest presides. Mostly: I was alone back before the soldier, and here I have Samiya.

“I'd like to pursue theater,” I say. There is a tatter of recollection, frayed, of seeing an opera. The stage was all around us while we curled in seats drifting like clouds. The white faces, the resplendent costumes, actors flying not on wings but on wheels of fire. The cymbals and the drums.

“Is that so? I understand you have a generous allowance, but you must think of the future.”

Her tone has gained a certain strident edge. It occurs to me that she is not as rich as the Parents, from whom I can inherit nothing—property cannot own property. She must think I'm somehow robbing her of the luxurious life owed her, spoiled and opulent, while she impotently toils. What a marvelous apparatus is the tyrant psyche. Whatever indignities have been inflicted on you by their breed, always they will find the angle perpendicular and turn the world such that it is they who gasp under the heaviest load, writhe under the harshest lash. “I think of the future,” I say,

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meeting Samiya's glance sidelong, "all the time. But my gracious parents will live to see many decades yet, I hope."

The advisor reluctantly gives me a list of theaters, some with informal academies attached to them. So informal that they don't violate the law that prohibits a non-citizen from higher education, though the advisor does warn that she doesn't recommend the option—no pedigree to any of them, no real future. I say I will take that into account.

On their part the parents are ecstatic with my choice, the curator for following his footsteps into the arts, the consul for further garnishing her household. I gravely let them know that I brim with gratitude for their support. From the age of ten I have been a most accomplished actor.

The Lapidary theater is on the other side of the planet, two continents away, the first time I'll be this far from the household—still not that far; most children go aboard to other worlds, but there are restrictions on the distance I can travel. Not off-planet, unless accompanied by my guardians. Not this year, and not after I've reached my majority. Age doesn't count for much when you're less than half a person. Property can be centuries old and it would still only be an object, owned and catalogued.

Samiya helps me pick out my wardrobe: we both agree it is critical to make a good first impression. We view the season's fashion from that part of the world, though ultimately every designer answers to the tastes of the capital. For everyday wear we choose long, narrow skirts; faceted waistcoats; close-cut shirts in moth and hummingbird fabric. Sharp collars or wide necklines, nothing in the between. Matte belts and earcuffs. I glance at a particular sheath dress and see in it a flattened shadow of the costumes in that play I watched, so long ago—the shape of it, the way it clings. But I don't order the dress or anything that even slightly resembles it, even though I suspect it would flatter me.

"You have to remember," Samiya says as they help me into a suit jacket, "that you are a striking individual, with exquisite manners and a face most will not forget."

I shift in the vantablack fabric. Once put on it seems entire sections of my torso and arms are gone, swallowed up in the dark. I put a ribbon around my throat, the same material and color, so it seems as though I've been garroted and my head hovers above my neck, functioning on miracle and ignorant bliss. "You are the only one who says that, Samiya. A consen-

material

sus of one is a sadly narrow survey.” Much as the parents dote on me, they will never say I’m much to look at, the lie too blatant to speak.

“What I say is as close to objectivity as can be had. Humans inhibit their own honesty and warp their own sense of aesthetics. But you will see.”

“What will you wear?” I turn. Finger an earcuff. Should I get rings of this same color too, so my fingers will look detached. All of me like that, in pieces, held together by nothing in particular. More than a fashion statement, a statement of existence and condition.

“I’ll wear the same things I always do. It’s unnecessary for me to dress well, and in any case I shouldn’t distract from your entry into adult society. You’re the primary exhibit, indeed the only one.”

Their practical optimism. Though to their credit, they are rarely wrong.

The Lapidary nests in the side of a cobalt cliff, overlooking a sea the color of tourmalines. Now red, now green. When I arrive it is late, the sky above the theater full of cyan butterflies, and I enter as part of the audience. The play is unfamiliar to me, and I’ve studied much of the tyrant’s canon, the classical and the formalist, the implosive and the explosive.

It is an experimental story, where a murder has perhaps happened, perhaps not; the survivors—if that is what they are—sit in the heart of a textile maze. They talk about everything except the murder-that-may-be. No cymbals or drums; the music is adagio, heavy on violins and heart-break. The acts are staccato and stop at arbitrary points, with scrambled chronology. Throughout, two of the surviving women exchange lingering glances, touch each other’s hands. Sometimes they disappear and return together. We are meant to suspect them of the murder, but the play leaves that question unresolved. For me the way these two women smile secretly ignites quite a different curiosity, one that has nothing to do with homicidal mystery or theatrical analysis.

I settle in a residence hall. It’s not until the third day that I’m cleared to enter the Lapidary’s backstage and meet their primary playwright, Mayaret Narangkul.

To my surprise she is barely my senior, twenty-one and citizen enough to attend the nearby university—not a prestigious or even a middling one, but still a university. She studies drama formally, and she wears her hair in

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nova strands, half keratin and half velvet-synth, all bright magenta. A tiny crested ibis lives in a hoop that depends from her left ear.

“Welcome,” she says to me, “though I’m surprised someone from the capital would pick this place.”

I don’t admit that I have few other choices. Instead I regard her with solemn politeness and say, “I hope to learn a lot from you.”

“What kind of roles do you imagine yourself in?”

I have not considered this throughout my self-taught lessons in controlling my voice, my expression, my body language. The idea of being an actor was so abstract that I never pinned down the specifics, and despite my diligent study of the canon, I couldn’t see myself in any of those characters. “That’s a judgment I leave to you or to a director.”

Mayaret claps her hands. “That’s good. I hate prima donnas who get the idea they’re born to play the leads and want to do that *right away, now, write a role just for me*. We do private plays just among the troupe, a little different from what we put on in public. You’ll audition for some minor parts, and we’ll see where we go from there. You don’t mind doing backstage labor, do you?”

I tell her that I don’t mind. She has me spend three weeks setting up backdrops, lighting, virtualities. Nothing back-breaking, and nothing that makes me think of her as malicious, only exacting. By week four, she lets me audition for a small role in the very play I first saw.

Onstage I watch the two women lean toward one another, talk in hushed voices not meant for the audience, their faces terribly close. In this version they touch one another more, a finger brushing a lock of hair, a thumb on chin just barely grazing the lips. It is subdued, implied, and yet at the same time explicit.

Mayaret watches me watching the leads. She tells me that I have a lot to learn, but I have the composure—“For a character full of poise and tragedy,” she says. “There’s such a thing as playing to your strength, though when you’re so new you should consider developing a range. What do you think?”

“I suspect I wouldn’t be much good at playing happy roles.” I’m still in costume, with snakes running down my skin. “But I’d be willing to try.”

She looks at me and laughs. “Yes, let’s try a lot of things.”

Most of the troupe are in transit, on the way to greater houses, a more lucrative career. Mayaret insists that the success of a performance is not

material

measured in the size of the audience, the price of a ticket. This is not a view most agree with.

When I introduce her to Samiya, Mayaret extends to them the rare courtesy of including them in conversations. This surprises me, and surprises Samiya more.

It is several months before Mayaret lets me take part in a public performance. My public debut is a secondary role, an aloof magistrate coveted by two young men. I would like to say the play is a wild success, but it fetches no greater ticket sales than any other, though the parents do come to watch and the curator promises to spread the word to his artist peers. Mayaret invites me out to celebrate my inauguration, making no mention of the donation, does not express either awe or contempt for the parents' positions.

Instead, in the small second-floor room of a small restaurant, she says, "You don't have stage fright at all. That's amazing. Have you been kissed yet?"

"No."

"No?"

I sip my water. Set it down. "Nobody's interested me."

Mayaret smiles and takes my glass. She presses her mouth to the rim, her gaze fastened to mine the entire time. "There we go."

It is only glass, it is only water. The imprint of her lips. When I drink again I am warm, nearly feverish, as though I'm drinking wine or a slow, living flame.

* * *

In another story, Mayaret and I would be earmarked for tragedy. One of us would leave the other for the security of legal matrimony. Perhaps one of us would be cornered in a dark alley and broken by a man. The lesson is this: to be as we are requires punishment and correction.

But I'm the one telling this, and in the matter of Mayaret as in all else, it is to my truth that I cleave.

A year passes, then two. I play more roles, a detective, a soldier, an adventurer. The Lapidary runs performances of canonical titles semi-regularly, but most of it is the work of independent playwrights like Mayaret, some even more obscure than she. She has a free run of the house and

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selects them to her taste: the difficult and the subversive, not always accessible even to me. But the curator parent keeps his promise and the consul sends us state guests for whom we put on patriotic plays. The founding of the tyrant nation, the triumph of its heroes down the ages, the victory of its righteous principles.

“It compromises my artistic integrity,” Mayaret admits to me in private, “but they do pay so well.” And those guests do keep the Lapidary far more comfortable than its revenue would otherwise.

She graduates at twenty-four. On that day she wears her hair in labradorite spumes. I attend the ceremony, then the more quiet celebration, just the troupe and her university friends. Mayaret’s parents don’t come; she barely admits to having family, and I never pry, just as she never pries as to my life before this one.

When the troupe and friends have gone home and we are alone in the backstage, she invites me to her room for a coffee. “From the Ixora Concord,” she says as she feeds the blend into the machine. She doesn’t ask how I want the coffee—she’s seen me drink many times, and adds an exact measurement of honey, the slightest spoonful of milk.

I inhale. “It smells gorgeous. This must be exclusive.” The Concord is independent, distant, and secretive. An armada nation that, so far, has evaded conquest.

“A gift from my aunt. She’s a mercenary, if you can believe such a profession exists. Used to be a citizen but—” Mayaret glances behind her, then turns the window to full opacity. “She renounced her citizenship a few years ago and left. She used to tell me that in the Ixora Concord you can be anything and do as you please, in every way. We’ve lost touch, though.”

“Leaving must have been difficult.” I curl my hand around my cup. “For her. For you.”

“It is what it is.”

I breathe in the coffee steam, the marvelous richness of it. The first taste is as good as it the aroma promises. Exactly as sweet as it needs to be, and no more. I eye her cup and reach for it—she drinks hers black. I put my mouth to the rim and take a single, bitter sip. My mouth leaves an imprint of pigment, cliff cobalt.

material

Mayaret takes the cup back from me and, deliberately, slowly, kisses that imprint. “You took your time,” she says against the ceramic, her own mouth newly and faintly blue.

“I wasn’t sure.” Another swallow of coffee, for good measure. The cup half-gone, my stomach very warm, all of me is. “Now I am.”

It is a new but also an incredibly natural act, this matter of disrobing and learning each other’s contours, this seeking of each other’s heat. We both taste of coffee on the mouth, but there’s also the salt of the skin, and the smell that is just Mayaret. I bury my hands in the luminescent froth of her hair; I kiss between her breasts and rub my cheek against the softness of her belly. She laughs, guides with delighted patience. Her touch on me is delicate lightning and I marvel afterward that it leaves no mark, only a brilliant current that stays in my blood long after.

The bed is narrow, but lying on our sides we fit onto it, fit into each other. We turn off the lights, fill the ceiling with a projected moon hanging as close as a fruit. She tells me about the snow-women of Ixora folklore, those gorgeous creatures of ice and immaculate winter. “That’s what you look like to me,” she says in my ear, “so beautiful you stop the blood. Make the heart stutter.”

I don’t spend the night. No doubt some of Mayaret’s closest friends know. But we live under the laws we do, and the arithmetic of survival demands.

At my apartment, Samiya is laying out fresh laundry in a crisp crackle of hummingbird and moth. They look up, ask if I had a good time.

“I had a brilliant time,” I say.

Even later I don’t tell Samiya what Mayaret and I have, but they would guess. And though Samiya’s animus was made by tyrant engineers, they inherit very little from their makers. All that is good in the conquerors can be found alone in Samiya.

When we have outings together, Mayaret would invite Samiya along. They demur at first; Mayaret insists. We go out for cocktails, tea, obscure confectionery of glutinous rice and gingko nuts—the things that jolt me, sometimes, into recalling my childhood. In this way, even though Mayaret does not mean to and cannot possibly know, she helps me rebuild. The

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faces of my mothers, the faces of my sisters, the red craggy mountains in which I was born. The wind on my face, the scent of new bamboo.

For several years more, this is how we go on; we could have kept going for a decade, three, the rest of our lives. A thousand rehearsals, a hundred opening nights. The moments with each other that cannot be measured by number or equation.

In my fifth year at the Lapidary, the consul goes abroad. A mission of importance, classified; it is not for me to know the details. What I do learn is the result. On the journey out, she is assassinated by insurgents. Insurgents from a planet annexed fifteen years ago.

To attack the tyrant body and injure the least of its appendages is to court annihilation, but the conquerors have left many of us with nothing to lose. No home, no nation, barely any memory.

I do not hear of whether the terrorists are hunted down. I do know that when I return to the parents' pastel home to meet the curator, I'm gripped with a terrible sympathy: this insidious emotion that I did not expect, but fear of mortality is the most deeply welded thing there is, the most intrinsic comprehension. The funeral is a grand affair, albeit with an empty casket. I'm not allowed to attend; I watch the broadcast.

One late evening, on the way to my apartment, Samiya and I find our path blocked by two strange men. They are not police or army, but they are armed, slightly intoxicated. They want to know where I'm from and where I am going.

Samiya steps before me. "I'm a defensive unit, citizens, and I am licensed to act in protection of my owner."

One of the men says, "*She* can't own anything." But they give.

In our room, Samiya sits me down and makes me something warm. I'm calm. There is a still center inside me, a pool of faultless surface tension. This was coming. What I am is forged by crisis and brutish adaptation, and what I have with Mayaret and the Lapidary was always going to be transient. "I wonder what happened to her, the girl who got her arm and leg broken."

"You should worry about yourself first. I'm calling Mademoiselle Mayaret."

Mayaret appears in mere minutes, much faster than it should be for her to cross from her side of the city to ours without violating traffic rules.

material

Immediately she presents me with a gun and asks Samiya, “How armed are you?”

They blink slowly. “I’m allowed to disable. Nothing more. It would be simpler if—”

“If I could marry her, yes.” Mayaret laughs, sharp and raw and angry. “I’ve got a few lawyer friends. At least one must know if I could adopt another adult, or something, anything.”

“You don’t have to,” I start.

“I want to. I insist. Meantime you’re going to move to the Lapidary. We have actual security there.”

It is true. More than one actor has their share of unwelcome admirers, and the theater is fortified with that in mind. I relocate. Business slows: we make the mistake of having me star in a performance, and though the owners—Mayaret’s rarely seen superiors—issue an apology and a very public ban of me from the stage, the Lapidary has next to no audience for the rest of the season. Even Mayaret’s friends, the subversive thinkers and the radical artists, disappear for the most part. Still she tells me that we can weather this, that we will find a way.

Her lawyer friends give her nothing to work with. I draw from my savings—which are really under the curator parent’s name—and purchase modules for Samiya, ones that enhance and add to certain specifications. It doesn’t turn them into a combat unit, but though I give Mayaret back the gun, I understand my reality.

When we are accosted again, Samiya disables a person for the first time. They are efficient about the fact, none of a soldier’s excess. There is little blood when it is done with an eye for resolution rather than for inflicting pain, for causing a slow death and for making the beaten creature plead.

The curator grants me legal protection when the matter is taken to court, but he will not always be there. Grief has turned him to stone, and I haven’t been an object of easy affection for a long time. A household ornament who no longer adorns is soon forgotten.

This story could have gone many different ways, all of them with death written into the fabric.

* * *

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It is strange which faces you remember, which you don't. I would not be able to point out my schoolmates from a crowd, the soldier who led the invasion that took my world, the workers who oversaw my adoption. But when the message appears in my interface, I recognize her immediately, the girl with the broken arm and leg. Grown of course, my age. Her nose is slightly crooked, and her left eye is missing. She says my name, and: "It is my duty to offer all of us what's been offered to me."

The offer is a set of coordinates that, mapped to any conventional locator, points to nothing. Just stellar debris that used to be a moon, far beyond the bounds of any nation, certainly far from the tyrant country. Find a way to reach this point, and there I will be given the option to seek asylum with the Ixora Concord, or join those from the annexed star.

I could reach back to her, this girl whom I did nothing to help all those years ago, and ask why. Is it the simple sharing of history, an obligation to a countrywoman, or something else. I do nothing at first—part inertia, part paranoia—until one of the Lapidary's actors disappears. (Another one to whom I make no overture of friendship, precisely because we share so much. Because we look like we could be distant family. Because we remember.) Mayaret worries herself sick over this absence, but the actor doesn't show up on broadcast as missing or a captured dissident. What turns up on broadcasts is non-citizens being rounded up for crimes of sedition, for terrorist sympathy. To have a face like mine is sufficient evidence.

Incessantly I map those coordinates, not on my interface but on paper that I'd incinerate afterward. The message has since dissolved itself.

I fly to meet the curator in the house he once shared with the consul. There are no longer aquatic eigenvectors fleeing through the rooms, no longer moth-glaze on the lamps. The place has become curiously muted and leeches, colors subtracted one by one toward a monochrome. I make my greetings, pay my respects to an image of the consul.

"Father, I'd like a favor," I say to the curator while making dinner. "Would it be possible for me to travel for a while? I can't without a guardian and I know you don't want to leave."

"It'd be safer for you to be away for sometime," he agrees, desultory, apathetic obligation. I don't fault him. "I'll assign a virtual proxy. Where

material

do you have in mind? Your mother had a summer home on—” His voice cracks. It is, I recall, where they first met.

“That would be perfect, thank you, Father.” It is not the time to think, *You are not my father and she was not my mother.* I bow my head, I kiss him on the brow. My last duty.

Samiya packs for me, reminding me of this or that essential, a favorite article of clothing. But in thirty years of existence I’ve accumulated little that I’d want to hold onto. What I bring instead is hard currency, a luggage full of things desired anywhere: rations, ammunition, first-aid supplies. The curator has hired a private ship for us, compact and fitted for fugue-paths, and Samiya would pilot. Departing tyrant territories will take circumnavigation, slipping from transfer point to transfer point, in and out of fugue. But I know my destination.

“You will have to tell the mademoiselle,” they say.

“It’d be selfish to ask her to leave everything she has.” The Lapidary. Her plays.

“It would be selfish,” says Samiya, “to fear her saying no so much that you would not even ask.”

They are right, of course, as they ever are.

* * *

This brings us to a point where, I believe, I can decide my own story. My ending. Our ending.

I know you want to stay. I know you have your stages, your scripts. And you might say that you do the most good here, telling stories that bring those like me to you, like the first that led me into your arms: the secret smiles, the shared glances. You know that I love your stories—they are a part of you more than my blood is a part of me. It is much to ask you to uproot all you have.

I’m thinking of what you told me of the Ixora Concord and of your aunt.

We can leave for a place where the width of the universe is as large as our longings, where we can be all that we can without limit or condition. We may have been marked for tragedy, but we do not have to abide by its rule. We will find other stages, or we will make them, and we can speak our

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truth before an audience that does not require that we hide what we mean,
what we want, the future we see. The present we have.

Come with me.

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Advance and Retreat: Sinn Féin and the “Compradorification” of the Revolutionary Party

Owain Rhys Phillips

A brief note on the nature of the Dublin legislature: On several occasions throughout this piece, the government in Dublin is referred to as “pseudo-independent,” indicating that the body that is constituted in Leinster House does not represent an independent government capable of representing the Irish people, even those within the twenty-six county state. Why do we take this view? In the first place, it is important to understand that the Dublin administration was not formed as an independent government by Sinn Féin in 1919 with a democratic mandate for Irish independence. The independent Irish government described above was dissolved in 1922 by collaborationist members of Sinn Féin who, with the backing of the British government in Westminster, would form the predecessor to the present Irish government.¹ The formation of this government at least partially drew its legitimacy from a British act of parliament intended to form

¹ Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 411; Peter Pyne, 1969, “The Third Sinn Féin Party: 1923-1926; I: Narrative Account,” *Economic and Social Review* 1, no. 1 (1969).

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an imperial dominion in the twenty-six counties.² The counterrevolutionary nature of this government, and why the British state considered its formation in its best interests, will be expanded on further later in this piece. However, the point demonstrated by this is that the Dublin government does not constitute a successor to the government that established the Irish Republic in 1919, but the successor to a government formed by a faction of British-aligned compradors within Sinn Féin in 1922.

However, this is not an argument formed in vulgar republican legitimism.³ The Dublin administration cannot be considered insufficiently independent on the basis of its formation alone. Rather, a proper analysis of its actions since reveals that, with a handful of notable exceptions, the government in Leinster House has acted in the interests of the capital-exporting bourgeoisie, as it was intended to by the British when they intervened to provoke its formation. Immediately following its formation, the government violently persecuted Republicans, engaging in extra-judicial killings and court-martial executions in order to prevent the establishment of a regime that was unfavorable to British interests in Ireland.⁴

Land reform enacted by the Dublin administration was limited and uneven, primarily enacted to bolster the Irish agricultural economy and provide a firm foundation for the development of large agricultural cooperatives in areas with unproductive farmland. These cooperatives would develop into a cornerstone of the economy of the twenty-six county state and become some of the largest capital-exporting agribusiness companies in the world.⁵ During the Anglo-Irish Trade War, the twenty-six county state attempted to decouple at least somewhat from the British economy and empower its own national bourgeoisie.⁶ This involved a policy of trade tariffs being imposed on British goods and refusal

² *Irish Free State Constitution Act: 1922* (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1922/1/pdfs/ukpga_19220001_en.pdf), 1.

³ "Irish Republican Legitimism" is a school of republican thought that holds that, for several reasons including the British act of parliament from which the 1922 government draws its legitimacy, the title of Dáil Éireann (Parliament of the Republic) was transferred to IRA army council. Depending on levels of adherence to this school of thought, adherents may consider the current legitimate government of the Republic to be Continuity IRA army council. While this ideological formation makes logical sense, it relies on a formulaic and dogmatic adherence to the structure of the constitution of the Irish Republic which at best makes it somewhat irrelevant to present conditions in Ireland and at worst resembles the arguments of Jacobite or Carlist legitimists.

⁴ C. S. Andrews, *Dublin Made Me* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1979), 269.

⁵ Iain Wallace, 1985, "Towards a Geography of Agribusiness," *Progress in Human Geography* 9, no. 4 (1985): 491-514.

⁶ Kevin O'Rourke, "'Burn Everything British But Their Coal': The Anglo-Irish Economic War of the 1930s," *Journal of Economic History* 51, no. 2 (1992): 57-366.

to pay land annuities to Britain while still extracting punishing debt payments from small farmers.⁷ While some may argue that this represented a marked departure from the policy of previous administrations, the result of this policy was to strengthen large Irish agribusiness, at most representing a transition from the Dublin administration legislating in the interests of the established international bourgeoisie and instead seeking to empower the upstart Irish national bourgeoisie to export capital in their own right.

These policies proved largely unsuccessful in empowering indigenous agro-industry to exercise influence internationally in the short term but did allow for a period of strengthening of the domestic agriculture industry that allowed the agricultural wing of the national bourgeoisie to capitalize on the opportunities provided to them by Ireland's admittance to the European Economic Community in 1973 (a policy largely motivated by the interests of the large agriculture lobbies in Ireland), a prerequisite of which was the total abandonment of trade protectionism.⁸ Finally, in 1998 the Dublin administration ceded any claim to the occupied six counties of Ulster in their constitution in order to allow the Good Friday Agreement to be passed, an action that not only put the state at odds with the vast majority of Irish people but also encapsulates the collaborationist nature of the legislature.⁹

In making this change, the Dublin administration renounced their right to act as an organ of democratic representation for the Irish people, in order to formally begin the pacification process that the Good Friday Agreement encompassed and make Ireland, north and south, an all the more attractive location for foreign direct investment with little opportunity for organized opposition to monopoly capitalist interests.¹⁰ All of this is to say that the independence of the Dublin legislature is entirely nominal, created as a placeholder administration by the British state to ensure the continued exploitability of Irish economic re-

⁷ "Land annuities" were payments made by the Dublin administration to the British state as part of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. As part of the land redistribution undertaken by the British in the late 1800s/early 1900s, farmers who received land that had been redistributed were considered to be in debt to the British state and had to make regular payments. During the Anglo-Irish Treaty, it was agreed that this debt would not be written off and that the Dublin administration would make these payments, collecting from the debtors themselves and delivering these payments to the British government. During the trade war, the Dublin government refused to make these payments but continued to collect annuities from the debtors. (Kevin O'Rourke, 357-366).

⁸ E. Moxon Browne, "Ireland in the EEC," *The World Today* 3, no. 10 (1975): 424-432.

⁹ Dáil Éireann, *The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Statute Book, 1998).

¹⁰ Republican Network for Unity, *A Revolutionary Republican Analysis of the Irish Pacification Process* (Belfast: Republican Network for Unity, 2013).

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sources by the international bourgeoisie, which then fostered the development of an indigenous monopoly capitalist class capable of exporting capital. There has in fact been no genuinely independent Irish government since 1922, as there has been no government in Ireland constituted by a democratic mandate to administer the affairs of the nation on behalf of the people of Ireland. Rather, there has been a legislature constituted in Dublin, formed on the basis of policy decided in the parliament of the colonial metropole in which less than 30% of the elected Irish representatives were present, that itself legislates in the interests of the international capital-exporting bourgeoisie. Such a legislature cannot be considered an independent one.

There is a truism in the Irish republican political tradition that is encapsulated in an 1898 quote from Fenian writer and militant Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa.¹ He writes:

It is in that English Parliament [that] the chains for Ireland are forged,
and any Irish patriot who goes into that forge to free Ireland will soon find himself welded into the agency of his country's subjection to England.²

While as social scientists we cannot take the above to be universally applicable purely based on the credentials of the source, there are few statements concerning the Irish struggle that have withstood the scrutiny of history more successfully. In this passage, O'Donovan Rossa identifies a key component of how Ireland was and is administered as a colonial possession—a process we will term “compradorification.” In the era the above passage was written, these nationalists-turned-compradors would have legislated within the Westminster Parliament, becoming part of the British administration in Ireland. However, in the century since, this analysis has become far more useful in understanding the role of the nationalists who enter the legislative institutions in Ireland, Stormont, and Leinster House and become part of the British administration in Belfast and the semi-

¹ Fenian is a term used to refer to members and supporters of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, a major republican fraternal organization that operated from the mid-1800s until after the Irish Civil War.

² Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, *Rossa's Recollections, 1838-1898: Memoirs of an Irish Revolutionary* (Lanham: Lyons Press, 1898), 145.

colonial comprador legislature in Dublin. This article will examine the process of compradorification in the abstract, seeking to understand how seemingly revolutionary nationalists can become administrators of colonial and semicolonial rule in Ireland by their membership of the northern and southern legislative institutions. This piece will investigate the process by which Sinn Féin, and particularly Provisional Sinn Féin, in the latter part of the 20th century was able to develop from perhaps the primary revolutionary organ for national liberation in Ireland to the comprador “constitutional nationalist” party it became by the turn of the millennium. Finally, an analysis will be conducted of the concept of counterrevolutionary retreat and how compradorification can be viewed as a form of retreat that must be guarded against.

In order to understand the process of compradorification in Ireland, we have to first demonstrate that the legislative bodies on the island of Ireland’s sole purpose is the administration of colonial and semicolonial rule and by design cannot be used in the process of national liberation. At the time O’Donovan Rossa was writing on the character of the Westminster Parliament, there was no legislature in Ireland, let alone an independent legislature. The weakness of the metropolitan parliament as a means of liberation for the colonized nation are somewhat self-explanatory. In brief, prior to the establishment of devolved and pseudo-independent legislatures in Ireland after 1920, a parliamentary strategy for Irish nationalism faced two insurmountable hurdles: the undemocratic nature of the Westminster Parliament and gradual integration into establishment politics. The Westminster Parliament would not establish a system of “one person, one vote” until 1928 (and not until 1968 in the occupied six counties of Ulster).³ Prior to this, a land qualification was required in order for women to exercise suffrage. It was only a decade prior that land qualification had been removed for men.⁴

At the time of O’Donovan Rossa’s writing, less than a quarter of Irish people had the right to vote, with the land qualification ensuring that

³ Ray Strachey, *The Women’s Movement in Great Britain: A Short Summary of its Rise, Methods and Victories* (London: The National Council of Women of Great Britain, 1928), 3; Hansard, *Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1968* (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/apni/1968/20?view=plain>), 1.

⁴ Hansard, *Representation of the People Act 1918*, 1.

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those who did were largely wealthy landowners in a country where the majority of the population were tenant farmers.⁵ Fundamentally, this institution was incapable of representing the interests of the majority of the Irish population, as only representatives who were able to appeal to landed Irishmen would be successful in winning a seat. Should these nationalists somehow achieve this feat, they would be met by another barrier to their championing an Irish nationalist project: the proportion of seats allotted to Ireland. In the 1918 British General Election, the final one to include representatives from all thirty-two counties of Ireland, 105 seats out of 707 were contested by Irish representatives.⁶ Even if a parliamentary nationalist party had taken every Irish seat in the Westminster Parliament with an explicit mandate for national self-determination, the British parties could easily outvote them and prevent any legal path for the establishment of self-government. Assuming a party did intend on taking this route to independence, building a successful electoral party to take an absolute majority of Irish seats in parliament would be the work of decades.

This brings us to the second hurdle: incorporation. In order for a party to be successful electorally with the demographic that had suffrage in this period (large landowners and the wealthy petty-bourgeois) it necessarily would have had to appeal to their interests. Father of Irish Republican political thought, Theobald Wolfe Tone, identified as early as the 1790s that the cause of an Irish republic with genuine economic sovereignty was largely not in the interests of the landowning class, no matter their religious background or national identification.⁷ In order then, to build this electoral majority you would necessarily have to temper whatever vision of a self-governing Ireland you did have until it was palatable to the classes that had the vote, by which point such an independence would be in name only. In the meantime, holding seats in the Westminster Parliament and

⁵ Chris Cook, *The Routledge Companion to Britain in the 19th Century, 1815-1914* (London: Routledge, 2005), 68.

⁶ A. De Bromhead, A. Fernihough, E. Hargaden, "Representation of the People: Franchise Extension and The 'Sinn Fein Election' in Ireland, 1918," *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 80, no. 3 (2020): 886; J.M. McEwen, "The Coupon Election of 1918 and Unionist Members of Parliament," *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 34, no. 3 (1962): 294-306.

⁷ T. W. Moody, R. B. McDowell, C. J. Woods, *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763-98: Volume II* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 107-120.

voting on legislation that would affect the Irish people places these nationalists in the role of administrator of colonial rule in Ireland. Effectively, these nationalists come to do the job of the British administration for them, watering down any political ambition until it poses no risk to British capital and, in the meantime, implementing policy from London to be imposed on Ireland. In effect, O'Donovan Rossa has identified the process of "compradorification" in Ireland in this extract. He recognizes that there is no route to an Irish Republic through the Westminster Parliament and that those who attempt to build one this way will become colonial administrators, assisting the British in the occupation of their own country.

This may have been the case in O'Donovan Rossa's time, but in the modern day the legislature has been devolved to Belfast and a pseudo-independent government established in Dublin. Do these bodies carry with them the same restrictions as the Westminster Parliament, and what role does partition play in their composition?

As a result of the civil rights movement in Ulster, the franchise has been extended to all legal adults in both jurisdictions of Ireland who are citizens of either the United Kingdom or Ireland.⁸ However, the restrictions on political activity have taken on a different character. Where the electorate is no longer restricted, the realm of legal political activity now is. There are strict norms within which political actors on the island of Ireland have to conform, or otherwise face their organizations being proscribed and the potential of lengthy prison sentences. Republicans that do not conform to the "constitutional" model of political change espoused by Sinn Féin and the SDLP [Social Democratic and Labour Party] have faced draconian legal action for particularly minor offenses,⁹ particularly when compared to the effective state sanction that loyalist paramilitary organizations receive in the occupied six counties.¹⁰ The clear message from the administrations north and south is to embrace an electoral strategy for political change.

⁸ Fionbarra O'Dochartaigh, *Ulster's White Negroes: From Civil Rights to Insurrection* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1994).

⁹ Seamus McKinney, "Police Search Saoradh HQ in 'Illegal Lottery' Probe," *The Irish News*, November 8, 2019, www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2019/11/08/news/police-search-saoradh-hq-in-illegal-lottery-probe-1759779/.

¹⁰ Jude Webber, "Northern Ireland: The Paramilitaries that 'Never Go Away,'" *Financial Times*, April 3, 2023, www.ft.com/content/7e83e463-0c45-46a6-a6a0-12668cb-65dc9.

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However, even when political parties do abandon abstentionism and attempt to run for political office, they meet constant harassment if they do not also condone the state apparatuses that ensure the status quo.¹¹

In 2022, the Irish Republican Socialist Party fielded candidates for election to the Belfast legislature. Despite this, their party offices have been raided multiple times by the Police Service of Northern Ireland [PSNI].¹² Members of the offshoot of Sinn Féin, Éirígí, which split from the party due to dissatisfaction over Sinn Féin's endorsement of the PSNI, have been arrested for taking photos of police officers and accused of acts of terrorism by journalists on Ireland's national broadcaster.¹³ The risk associated with terror charges in Ireland is compounded by the system of "Special Criminal Courts," courts in which no jury is required in determining the guilt of the accused, which are disproportionately used against republican political prisoners.¹⁴ Additionally, in the twenty-six counties administered from Dublin, mere membership of proscribed organizations can be punished with a prison sentence and the opinion of Garda [police] can be admitted as evidence, as though it were materially relevant to the case.¹⁵ While this has always been the case in one form or another in Ireland, since the ascendancy of the counterrevolutionary faction within Sinn Féin, the lines that define acceptable political behavior have narrowed considerably. Even the acknowledgement of republican prisoners is beyond the pale for Sinn Féin in the present day, preferring to ignore the political charges on which peo-

¹¹ "Abstentionism" in Irish Republicanism is used to refer to the policy by which Irish republicans abstain from taking their seats in colonial and comprador parliaments such as Westminster, Stormont, and Leinster House.

¹² Allison Morris, "Video: PSNI Officers Use Chainsaw to Remove Front Door of IRSP's West Belfast Office During Raid," *Belfast Telegraph*, September 8, 2021, www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/video-psni-officers-use-chainsaw-to-remove-front-door-of-irsps-west-belfast-office-during-raid/40830699.html.

¹³ *BBC News*, "Éirígí Press Officer Stephen Murney Cleared of Terrorism Charges," February 24, 2014, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-26328297; John McGuirk, "RTE To Pay €20,000 to Charity After Republican Party Éirígí is Wrongly Linked to Murder on Prime Time," March 18, 2021, www.thejournal.ie/rte-eirigi-apology-5385501-Mar2021/.

¹⁴ An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna, "The Special Criminal Court," www.courts.ie/special-criminal-court.

¹⁵ Ronan McGreevy, "Offenses Against the State Act: Is It Still Needed," *The Irish Times*, June 21, 2023, www.irishtimes.com/politics/2023/06/21/offences-against-the-state-act-introduced-to-combat-the-ira-is-it-still-needed/.

ple have been imprisoned and condemn republicans languishing in British and Irish prisons as common criminals (particularly ironic considering the similar charges faced and prison sentences served by many within the current leadership of Sinn Féin only a few decades ago).¹⁶

Occupation and colonialism necessitate a higher level of political control than in most states, but the existence of revolutionary organs strong enough to resist state control provided spaces within which radical political work could be discussed and undertaken—not without danger, but with a greater level of security than is the case presently. The absence of such an organization, a role previously occupied by Sinn Féin, has meant that for republicans who are committed to a thirty-two county socialist republic, there is little room to maneuver without coming into contact with state security forces. As seen in the draconian powers wielded by administrations north and south, challenges to republican organizing are as pronounced, if not more so, as they ever have been in peacetime.

The dynamic of partition now also must be considered. As mentioned previously, in 1922 a new government for Ireland was formed by a British act of parliament that provided the counterrevolutionary wing of the original incarnation of Sinn Féin the right to form a parliament in Ireland. This privilege was afforded to this faction of Sinn Féin by virtue of their agreeing to the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, whereby two separate administrations would be formed in Dublin and Belfast to legislate on behalf of the interests of the monopoly capitalist class, with varying degrees of proximity to the British parliament in Westminster. When the six and twenty-six county states were formed, the intention was that a northern state with a built-in unionist majority be created to ensure the most industrialized region of the country remained within British control, with no economic barriers between the shipyards of Belfast and the industries that relied on them on the island of Britain. In addition, the more volatile and nationalist twenty-six county state was to be given dominion status, with unrest now becoming the responsibility of the Dublin administration; the Irish Free State being poorer and more economically agrarian, providing a

¹⁶ Kevin Mullan, "Dissident Republican Group Claims 'There are Dozens of Political Prisoners in the North,'" *Derry Journal*, February 22, 2024, www.derryjournal.com/news/politics/dissident-republican-group-claims-there-are-dozens-of-political-prisoners-in-the-north-4529597.

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steady flow of agricultural goods and cheap labor across the Irish Sea without the need for direct British intervention.¹⁷

This necessarily adds an additional anti-democratic hurdle, in that a gerrymandered northern legislature exists. Where a single all-Ireland legislature would be able to produce a democratic majority and mandate for national liberation in a single election, the northern and southern legislatures have been designed to prevent a national democratic mandate being established. However, just as in the case of the Westminster Parliament, even if you managed to get an absolute majority in both the Belfast and Dublin administrations, with the singular purpose of demanding a referendum on the unification of Ireland, further barriers await you. In the text of the Good Friday Agreement, the document that creates the legal framework by which a referendum on a United Ireland can be held, provision is made so that this referendum can only be called by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland “if at any time it appears likely to him that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom.”¹⁸ This in effect gives the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, an unelected British official, the say over whether a referendum on a United Ireland should be called. These obstructions make the task of any organization attempting to build an Irish Socialist Republic through parliamentary means effectively impossible. These legislative institutions, despite being on the island of Ireland, are no more in the control of the people of Ireland than the Westminster Parliament was. The only difference is that the constraints are more opaque and harder to work against.

The impossibility of a parliamentary road to an Irish Republic with genuine economic sovereignty has been a widely held belief amongst republicans since the mid-1800s, and was even codified in Sinn Féin’s official program in 1905.¹⁹ This advancement in the revolutionary strategy of the republican movement was the product of the work of generations of

¹⁷ Irish Communist Organisation, *The Economics of Partition* (Dublin: Irish Communist Organisation, 1969).

¹⁸ Hansard, Northern Ireland Act 1998, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/47/contents?view=plain, 1.

¹⁹ Brian Feeney, *Sinn Fein: A Hundred Turbulent Years* (Dublin: O’Brien Press, 2002), 33-34.

militant nationalists. Deviation from this principle was the primary motivation behind the modern incarnation of Sinn Féin, Provisional Sinn Féin, splitting from Official Sinn Féin in 1970.²⁰ How was it then that this same party could become the standard bearer for “constitutional nationalism,” embrace the role of comprador administration wholeheartedly and begin to persecute republicans who did not follow them in their retreat?²¹ This process is best understood when examined from the 1970 Official/Provisional split onwards. Prior to this split, Sinn Féin had held to a policy of abstentionism, refusing to take a seat in either the Belfast or Dublin legislatures due to a recognition of their character as colonial and semicolonial institutions that were not equipped to create an Irish Republic.²² However, during the late 1960s a movement had been growing within Sinn Féin for a reappraisal of the character of the southern legislature. While the Belfast government was considered at that time beyond the pale for republicans to endorse, a revisionist strain of republicans had begun considering the opportunities possible through electoralism in the twenty-six county state.²³

It could be argued that this turn was itself an overcorrection against the “purely military” strategy of the late fifties and early sixties—a product of a rightward turn in the party in the 1950s. The peripheralization of the organization and of Sinn Féin had resulted in a smaller, largely petty-bourgeois membership who lacked a unified political philosophy beyond continuity republicanism and the influence of Catholic theology.²⁴ The result was a strategy largely devoid of a political component, producing deviations into “putschism” by the IRA and had yielded little gains for the movement as a whole.²⁵ The failure of this line revealed the dominant line of the

²⁰ Peter Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1998), 67.

²¹ “Constitutional Nationalism” is a term used in Ireland to refer to political parties that pursue the reunification of the country through electoral means. After their abandonment of abstentionism and certainly post-Good Friday Agreement this term has been used to describe Sinn Féin.

²² Feeney, 168-170.

²³ Brian Hanley, Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers Party* (London: Penguin, 2010), 145.

²⁴ Pat Walsh, *Irish Republicanism and Socialism: The Politics of the Republican Movement* (Belfast: Athol Books, 1994), 41-42.

²⁵ Hanley and Millar, 10-18; Mao Zedong, *Five Golden Rays* (Paris: Foreign Languages Press, 2017), 35.

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movement at the time to be right-deviationist and erroneous. However, rather than a correct line emerging from this failure, line struggle was improperly handled and a reactionary, left-deviationist strategy instead came to the position of prominence. This analysis promoted the idea of abandoning abstentionism altogether, losing great ideological advances made by the movement, and instead seeking to win a socialist republic through the ballot box and rapprochement with the unionist community through working-class unity. This deviation was erroneous for several reasons—primarily the misunderstanding of the importance of abstentionism within the republican party program and an incorrect analysis of the nature of settler colonialism within Ireland preventing the construction of a genuinely cross-community socialist republican movement.²⁶

While couched in the language of revolutionary theory, this revisionist turn in the thinking of the party was in fact an example of opportunism. The counterrevolutionaries pushing this line may have worn the trappings of revolutionaries, but in fact wanted nothing more than to retreat from the gains achieved by previous generations of republicans and enmesh themselves into the colonial and semicolonial regimes that govern Ireland. By the time of the 1970 Sinn Féin *Ard Fheis*, what amounted to an anti-democratic coup had taken place within the party, with several *cumann* that favored the continuation of an abstentionist policy having their voting rights removed.²⁷ As a result of this manipulation and misguided analysis, the anti-abstentionist policy passed. This abandonment of revolutionary means and turn towards electoralism was in effect a form of retreat, abandoning the vantage point achieved through struggle so far and opting for a conciliatory strategy that may benefit the careerist individuals within the party but not the masses within and without the movement who were effectively abandoned by this about course. It was recognized as such by a large number of the delegates in attendance who left the *Ard Fheis* to form the provisional, abstentionist Sinn Féin. From this position, Provisional Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA would go on to wage what was possibly the most successful period of armed struggle in Ireland since

²⁶ Hanley and Millar, 256–257.

²⁷ Feeney, 250–251. *Ard Fheis* means annual party conference. *Cumann* is an Irish word meaning association or club. *Cumann* (plural) are the smallest formative unit of Sinn Féin, equivalent to a local party branch in English.

the War of Independence. Utilizing a twin strategy of political organizing and guerilla tactics, the provisional movement was able to achieve several of its key goals, including forcing the British to dissolve the Belfast administration and rule directly from London.²⁸

However, this split was improperly handled on an ideological basis once again, and while the Provisional movement did have a commitment to community activism, its strategy amounted to little more than a return to the “purely military” strategy of a decade previous, with an added, uncoordinated “community work” element. That is to say individual activists within the movement were involved in community work, but the lack of a coordinated strategy within the movement betrayed the fact that the primary means by which the Provisionals hoped to achieve a Republic was by physical force. With little ideological coordination to direct efforts outside of the realm of military strategy, the Provisional movement once again ventured into the territory of adventurism.²⁹ In 1975, secret talks were brokered between the Provisional IRA army council and representatives of the British government, where the Provisionals established their terms for ending military operations, including British withdrawal and the release of political prisoners.³⁰ One of the British demands to have these talks take place was that the Provisional IRA call a ceasefire.³¹ Talks dragged on for several months, with the IRA believing that it had brought the British to the verge of withdrawal.

The occupying forces took this as an opportunity to regroup, however, with peace talks intended as a distraction to allow the IRA to be militari-

²⁸ Patrick Mulroe, *Bombs, Bullets and the Border: Policing Ireland's Frontier* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2017), 129-131.

²⁹ The noted lack of ideological co-ordination should not be taken to mean that little ideological development occurred. In fact, during the period of internment, ideological development was probably at its most accelerated. However, it tended in various directions with notable deviationist tendencies amongst genuine progress and a lack of endorsement or consideration of these proposals amongst the Sinn Féin leadership who remained outside of the internment camps lead to external ideological stagnation. For further information on this topic see Feargal Mac Ionnachtaigh's *Language Resistance and Revival: Republican Prisoners and the Irish Language in the North of Ireland* (London: Pluto, 2013) and Tommy McKearney's *The Provisional IRA: From Insurrection to Parliament* (London: Pluto, 2011).

³⁰ Taylor, 140-143.

³¹ Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (London: Pan, 2003), 158.

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ly outmaneuvered. The ceasefire greatly exacerbated a growing rift within both the IRA and Sinn Féin between the old-guard; it coalesced around the organizers who had pushed the retention of abstentionist policy and the adventurist “purely-military” strategy, and a set of newer activists who questioned republican “home truths” on the basis that if the leadership had been misled on the ceasefire, it may also be misled about other aspects of the struggle.³² This rift gave opportunity for a left-deviationist line, previously eschewed by the provisional movement, to establish itself amongst younger sectors of the membership who had joined the movement in the late 1960s during the major outbreak of inter-communal violence.

One particular idea that grew amongst these younger cadres was the “armalite and ballot box” strategy, an idea that a shift in strategy was needed so that neither military struggle nor electoralism should be written off, and instead both tactics could be used to achieve the same goal. This right-deviationist, opportunistic line was formed similarly to the anti-abstentionist deviation in the 1970 *Ard Fheis*, where party members who had witnessed the failures of the “purely-military” strategy took the opportunity to propel themselves into prominence and push erroneous strategies that had the potential to bring the party into the establishment and neutralize any threat it posed to the colonial and semicolonial regimes in Dublin and Belfast.³³ In this instance, the justification used did not feature the cross-community working class alliance arguments of the previous deviation, as a decade of sectarian conflict had writ-large the near impossibility of convincing the Protestant community of their common class interest with the Catholic community. Instead the argument was couched far more cynically, in the language of using any tools available to achieve the same goal.

Despite this difference, these arguments stem from the same right-deviationist, opportunistic line. While each deviation differs in rhetoric, both are retreats motivated by the same urge to give up the work of building socialist republic and reap the rewards of those who enter the colonial and semicolonial establishment. While a recognition of the missteps of the faction conveying the “purely-military” strategy and a reappraisal of that line was necessary in order to develop the struggle for national liberation to a higher stage, the push for a dual strategy was in effect a retreat from

³² Taylor, 197.

³³ Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (London: Penguin, 2007), 144-147.

the level of development the movement was already at and a return to a previous stage of revolutionary development prior to the recognition of electoralism as a wasteful and dangerous dead end. This incorrect analysis was allowed to grow until in 1986, a core of revisionist republicans pushed through an anti-abstentionist amendment to the constitution at that year's *Ard Fheis*, formalizing the dual strategy as Sinn Féin's solution to British colonialism in Ireland.

While this resolution was adopted with the firm commitment to not enter the Belfast administration, it has since become clear that the revisionists were happy to gain legitimacy within the establishment by any means necessary.³⁴ The “dual strategy period” that followed was a process of backsliding on hard-learned lessons by Irish revolutionaries in order so that the formerly revolutionary movement could become an accepted part of the established colonial and semicolonial apparatus in Ireland. In short, to compradorify the revolutionary party.

Volunteers with the Provisional IRA and republican activists continued to work and die for the goal of a socialist republic that the leadership of Sinn Féin had all but abandoned. In fact, these soldiers and organizers were dying for the dream of a circle of party bureaucrats who had resolved that nothing was off the table if it allowed them to become administrators in the colonial and semicolonial legislatures in Ireland. These measures included the Good Friday Agreement, which copper fastened partition and established an anti-democratic, consociational electoral system, ensuring a firm sectarian divide persisted not just in the communities of the occupied six counties but also in its parliament.³⁵ In 2007, Sinn Féin again dropped a core principle of the republican tradition and agreed to appoint members

³⁴ CAIN Web Service, “Text of the Motion on Abstentionism (Resolution 162) as presented to the Sinn Féin *Ard Fheis*, Dublin, (November 2, 1986),” <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/sf/resolution162.htm>.

³⁵ Consociationalism is method of structuring bourgeois parliamentary democracies whereby a government must be formed from a coalition of the largest parties representing distinct groups within a society. In Ulster, any Stormont government has to be formed by the largest party representing the “Unionist” community and the largest party representing the “Nationalist” community, effectively enshrining sectarianism into the democratic process of the territory.

CYM Committee, “Removing the Veil,” *Connolly Youth Movement*, April 25, 2023, <https://cym.ie/2023/04/25/removing-the-veil/>.

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to the policing board within the Belfast administration, becoming codirectors of the colonial police force in Ulster.³⁶

Since Sinn Féin has taken this position, the number of “random” stop and searches have risen rather than fallen, disproportionately targeting Catholics, especially children, for strip searches.³⁷ These retreats from the previously advanced state of the national revolution in Ireland are not just opportunistic and counterrevolutionary, they are fundamentally not Sinn Féin’s retreats to make. These positions were not territory won by the recent groups of higher ups within Sinn Féin, they were won by generations of republicans and the broader revolutionary masses who Sinn Féin until recently claimed to represent. It is by this process of retreat that Sinn Féin have been able to legitimize themselves in the eyes of the colonial and semicolonial establishments in Ireland. So much so that, at time of writing, Sinn Féin is the primary colonial administrator in the Belfast legislature and is poised to be the ruling party in Dublin’s semicolonial legislature at the next election in the twenty-six county state. Not only has the revolutionary line struggle completely failed, causing the party to become inherently counterrevolutionary, but the party has also been able to enmesh itself so thoroughly in the colonial and semicolonial structures that it will soon become one of the largest barriers to the establishment of a thirty-two-county socialist republic of Ireland.

Why would a revolutionary movement retreat and what is counterrevolutionary about the process of retreat? Firstly we have to establish our terms. When “advance” is used in this context, it is used to mean the revolutionary strategic and ideological advances made by material analysis and struggle by the revolutionary movement—that is to say, when revolutionary activity yields new information and strategic developments useful in further revolutionary activity. When “retreat” is used in this context, we

³⁶ Owen Bowcott, “Historic Vote Ends Sinn Féin’s Long Battle with the Police Force in Northern Ireland,” *The Guardian*, January 29, 2007, www.theguardian.com/politics/2007/jan/29/uk.northernireland.

³⁷ Amnesty International, “Northern Ireland: PSNI Must Stop Strip Searching Children Immediately,” January 12, 2023, www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/northern-ireland-police-must-stop-strip-searching-children-immediately; Connla Young, “Over Twice as Many Catholic Children Strip Searched by PSNI,” *The Irish News*, June 27, 2023, www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/06/27/news/twice_as_many_catholic_children_strip_searched_by_psn-3385989/.

specifically mean a counterrevolutionary retreat on ideological principles or from established correct strategy. In order for an action to be considered a retreat, a movement or party must abandon principles that have been proven in both material analysis and practical struggle. For example, the abandonment of the principle of abstentionism from the colonial and semicolonial parliaments in Ireland was an ideological retreat by Sinn Féin as the policy of abstentionism was an example of an advance, proven to be a correct strategy by the efforts of generations of revolutionary republicans. To abandon this policy, and in doing so, discredit it due to Sinn Féin's position as standard bearer for the republican movement at that time, was a significant retreat that seriously weakened the revolutionary movement in Ireland and its ability to work in the interests of the masses.

This example provides us with the reason why a revolutionary movement may retreat: a failure to resist counterrevolutionary, opportunist elements pushing lines that demand the abandonment of known truths and established tactics. This act of retreat will not necessarily be presented by its proponents as a form of backsliding. From their perspective, it may be the process of challenging orthodoxies or attempting to produce new tactical or ideological developments that may aid the movement. This attitude may emerge from an ignorance of how previous lines were agreed upon and why certain positions are held to be true. Whatever the motivation, however, these ideas should be combatted firmly and quickly. As in the case of Sinn Féin, a lack of proper attention to ideological deviations allowed these incorrect ideas to spread amongst the membership until the movement entered into a process of retreat. Treating these deviations requires proper systems of education, forums within which the membership can discuss the revolutionary program guided by comrades with a good grasp of material conditions and the movement's analysis, disciplinary action in the case of major missteps, etc. In the most serious cases, a rectification movement may need to be embarked upon—in short, systems that promote a proper approach to line struggle.

Ultimately, the failure to prevent the movement entering into retreat was in large part due to a failure of the revolutionary line to be properly asserted and the victory of the counterrevolutionary line, highlighting to modern republicans in Ireland the importance of a properly structured revolutionary party with the means to engage in line struggle and advance

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further the ideology by which we understand our situation and work to change it. It is the responsibility of the party and its entire membership to promote proper line struggle to prevent the retreat from advances born out of study and struggle. Those cadres who do not commit themselves to this process are themselves opening up the revolutionary party and movement to the possibility of retreat. The compradorification of Sinn Féin signifies the party's inability to properly maintain its revolutionary character through this line struggle and a defeat of those cadres actively involved in pushing the revolutionary line.

In short, Sinn Féin's retreat showed the party's structural inability to defend the advances of the republican movement up until that point and the failures of its membership to engage in line struggle to defend and heighten those advances. Should any organization constitute itself on the basis of defending those advances and progressing the struggle for national liberation in Ireland, its first goal should be the establishment of structures within itself to promote properly performed line struggle and prevent the possibility of retreat. As modern revolutionaries we are inheritors not of orthodoxies but of proven ideological and strategic advances. Should we not take up the work to defend these advances and to make further advances, we risk damage not only to our project but to the wider national liberation movement. In essence, to not engage in this line struggle to defend the advances we have proven to be correct and to combat erroneous or defeatist lines is to allow counterrevolutionary lines to be pushed and for retreats to occur.

Ireland is a country divided between two political administrations: one colonial, one semicolonial. Through these administrations it is impossible to bring into being the Irish Republic declared in 1916. All that is possible through entering the Belfast and Dublin legislatures is winning the possibility to administer Ireland on behalf of the imperialist class. More than a century of revolutionary study and practice has proven this to be true. We can hold this to be a major advance in revolutionary theory as applied to the island of Ireland that we must not disregard. In the past, we can see when parties have reconsidered this theoretical advancement they have begun the process of retreat into counterrevolution, devolving from the standard bearer of the republican movement in Ireland to revisionist electoral party, striving to embrace the role of comprador administrator

and enmeshing themselves into the colonial and semicolonial establishment, using the tools of the state to terrorize the people the movement was established to represent and liberate.

This process is inherently counterrevolutionary and should be opposed vigorously. The advancements that the revolutionary movement safeguard are the product of decades and centuries of study and action by the revolutionary masses. To retreat from these advances, to wash our hands of these major strides forward in favor of reappraisal of strategies that have been proven to be erroneous, to discard the product of the toil of our comrades for an easier, more appealing, unsuccessful alternative is inherently counterrevolutionary and as a tendency must be challenged wherever it is found in the movement. In Ireland, this retreat has resulted in a major defeat for the revolutionary movement. What was previously the organ of national liberation now administers the police force that disproportionately targets revolutionary republicans.

This movement that was previously the people's sole weapon against the colonial and semicolonial state is pursuing power in Dublin so it can work hand-in-hand with the imperialist powers that subjugate the Irish working class. Only an organization properly constituted to challenge erroneous deviations and incorrect lines within its membership will be able to rebuild the progress we have lost in the provisional project and advance the revolutionary movement further. The responsibility of every cadre is to take up the revolutionary line struggle within the party, to advance revolutionary positions and defend preexisting advances. The lessons that must be learned from the past fifty years of revolutionary struggle in Ireland, particularly concerning electoralism, are clear. We can cede no ground to the erroneous idea that liberation can come from within the colonial and semicolonial legislatures on this island, and we cannot allow the growth of positions within our movement that run counter to the established facts of our struggle. Correct ideas "come from social practice, and from it alone."³⁸ A revolutionary movement that does not hold this statement to be true, does not put into effect measures to defend the advances brought about by social practice, and allows differing ideas to grow on the validity

³⁸ Mao Zedong, "Where do Correct Ideas Come From," *Five Essays on Philosophy* (Utrecht: Foreign Languages Press, 2018), 187.

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of established advances, makes itself vulnerable to backsliding, counterrevolutionary retreat, and, in extreme cases, compradorification.

Excerpts from the Second Congress of the Third International: The National and Colonial Question

The following excerpts are from the fifth session of the Second Congress of the Third International (July 28 1920). The discussion of this session was on a series of theses on the national and colonial question, initially introduced by Lenin in the fourth session. Since the discussion was very long, we have chosen to excerpt some parts that we think remain relevant. First of all, we are reproducing the aforementioned theses that were being discussed during that discussion, particularly since discussants would have had this document before them and were debating about the relevant points. Indeed, this version of the theses (originally appended to the end of the proceedings of the fifth session) was slightly altered by some of the input of this discussion. Secondly, we have provided excerpts of some of the statements of the delegates involved in the discussion that contributed to the development of these theses.

The existence of these theses and the discussion surrounding them are important because they demonstrate:

1. The Communist International of Lenin's time was concerned with the contradictions created by colonialism and understood that struggles against capitalism also entailed struggles against colonialism;
2. A number of participants in this discussion came from the European colonies and semi-colonies and were also involved in struggles for na-

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tional self-determination;

3. Even before 1948 the Communist International saw the Zionist movement as a colonial movement united with British imperialism.¹

As an artifact of its time, however, the theses and the connected discussion use terms such as “backwards” and “advanced” nations to describe the colonies/semi-colonies and the imperialist nations, respectively. To be clear, these terms were descriptors of productive forces (i.e. a wealthy, capitalist nation would have more developed, and thus advanced, technological and economic infrastructure—Lenin and others had previously referred to their own country as being “backwards” in this regard) rather than chauvinistic/moralistic remarks on a nation’s culture and traditions. Such terminology, however, has become loaded. But here it is worth noting that, even at the time, there was some recognition that such a misunderstanding of the terms could emerge. As the Italian delegate Serrati pointed out in this same session: “The definition of ‘backward’ countries is too indefinite and too imprecise for it not to be open to various chauvinist interpretations.”—Eds.

Theses on the National and Colonial Question

1. An abstract or formal conception of the question of equality in general and national equality in particular is characteristic of the bourgeoisie by its very nature. Under the pretense of the equality of the human person in general, bourgeois democracy proclaims the formal legal equality of the proprietor and the proletarian, of the exploiter and the exploited, and thus deceives the oppressed classes in the highest degree. The idea of equality, which is itself a reflection of the relations of commodity production, is transformed by the bourgeoisie, under the pretext of the absolute equality of the human person, into a tool in the struggle against the abolition of classes. The true significance of the demand of equality lies only in the demand for the abolition of classes.

2. As the conscious expression of the proletarian class struggle to throw off the yoke of the bourgeoisie, and in accordance with its main task, which

¹ There has been some confusion over this matter since, despite the resolutions during this congress, the Soviet Union recognized the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 (before changing its opinion in 1955). This extremely unfortunate inconsistency is a similar low point to China’s recognition of the Pinochet regime in 1973.

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is the fight against bourgeois democracy and the unmasking of its lies and hypocrisy, the Communist Party should not place the main emphasis in the national question on abstract and formal principles, but in the first place on an exact evaluation of the historically given and above all economic milieu. Secondly it should emphasize the explicit separation of the interests of the oppressed classes, of the toilers, of the exploited, from the general concept of the national interest, which means the interests of the ruling class. Thirdly it must emphasize the equally clear division of the oppressed, dependent nations which do not enjoy equal rights from the oppressing, exploiting, privileged nations, as a counter to the bourgeois democratic lie which covers over the colonial and financial enslavement of the vast majority of the world's total population, by a tiny minority of the richest and most advanced capitalist countries, that is characteristic of the epoch of finance capital and imperialism.

3. The imperialist war of 1914 has shown all the enslaved nations and oppressed classes throughout the world with particular clarity the mendacity of bourgeois-democratic phraseology. Justified on both sides by phraseology about peoples' liberation and the right of nations to self-determination, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest² on the one side and the Treaty of Versailles and St. Germain³ on the other have shown that the victorious bourgeoisie determines even "national" frontiers to suit its economic interests. Even "national" frontiers are merely objects of trade for the bourgeoisie. The so-called "League of Nations" is merely the insurance policy by which the victors in this war mutually guarantee their booty. The strivings to re-establish national unity, for "reunification

² The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918) ended Russia's involvement in World War I, with the Bolsheviks signing the treaty in accordance with their slogan of "Peace, Land, and Bread," reflecting the popular desire for an end to the First Inter-Imperialist War and domestic stability. It resulted in significant territorial losses for Russia to the Central Powers. The Treaty of Bucharest (1918) was signed between Romania and the Central Powers, forcing Romania to cede territory and recognize German influence in the region. Both treaties illustrate the upheaval and territorial realignment in Eastern Europe following World War I.

³ The Treaty of Versailles (1919) marked the end of World War I and imposed punitive measures on Germany, including heavy reparations and territorial losses. The Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye (1919) dissolved the Austro-Hungarian Empire, creating new states in Eastern Europe. However, it failed to address socioeconomic inequalities within these states, leading to continued exploitation and instability.

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with ceded territories” are for the bourgeoisie nothing other than the attempts by the vanquished to gather strength for new wars. The reunification of nations that have been artificially torn apart also corresponds to the interests of the proletariat. The proletariat can however only achieve real national freedom and unity by the path of revolutionary struggle and over the body of the defeated bourgeoisie. The League of Nations and the whole post-war policy of the imperialist states reveal this truth even more clearly and sharply, everywhere strengthen the revolutionary fight not only of the proletariat of the advanced countries but also of the toiling masses of the colonies and the dependent countries, and hasten the collapse of petty-bourgeois illusions in the possibility of peaceful coexistence and the equality of nations under capitalism.

4. From the principles set forth it follows that the whole policy of the Communist International on the national and colonial question must be based mainly on the union of the workers and toiling masses of all nations and countries in the common revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the landlords and of the bourgeoisie. For only such a union can secure victory over capitalism, without which the destruction of national oppression and inequality is impossible.

5. The international political situation has now placed the dictatorship of the proletariat on the order of the day, and all the events in international politics are concentrated inevitably around one single central point, around the struggle of the international bourgeoisie against the Russian Soviet Republic. The latter rallies around itself, on the one hand, the soviet movements of the vanguard of the working class in every country and, on the other hand, all the national liberation movements of the colonies and the oppressed nationalities who have been convinced by bitter experience that for them there is no salvation outside an alliance with the revolutionary proletariat and the victory of soviet power over world imperialism.

6. Consequently it is impermissible today to limit oneself to mere recognition or proclamation of sympathy with the toilers of various nations, but it is necessary to pursue a policy of bringing about the closest possible alliance between all the national and colonial liberation movements with Soviet Russia. The forms of this alliance will be determined by the stage of development of the communist movement among the proletariat of ev-

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ery country or of the revolutionary liberation movement in the backward countries and among the backward nationalities.

7. Federation is a transitional form on the way to the complete unification of the toilers of all nations. Federation has already showed its expediency in practice, not only in the relations between the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic and the other Soviet Republics (the Hungarian, Finnish, and Latvian in the past, those of Azerbaijan and the Ukraine at present), but also within the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, even in relation to nationalities who possessed neither political existence nor self-government (for example the Bashkir and Tatar Republics in the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, which were set up in 1919 and 1920).

8. The task of the Communist International in this respect consists not only in the further development of this federation based on the soviet order and the soviet movement but also in its study and the testing of our experiences with it. Recognizing that Federation is a form in the transition to complete unification, we must strive for an ever closer federal link. What must be taken into consideration is first the impossibility for the Soviet Republics, surrounded as they are by the militarily significantly stronger imperialist states of the whole world, of continuing to exist without closer links with other Soviet Republics; secondly the necessity of a close economic alliance between the Soviet Republics, without which it is impossible to restore the productive forces destroyed by capitalism and assure the welfare of the toilers; and thirdly the efforts to create a unified world economy according to a common plan regulated by the proletariat of all nations. This tendency has already emerged quite openly under capitalism and insistentlly seeks its further development and completion under socialism.

9. In the sphere of relations within states the national policy of the Communist International cannot confine itself to the bare formal recognition of the equality of nations, expressed only in words and entailing no practical obligations, to which the bourgeois democracies confine themselves, even those that call themselves "socialist."

It is not sufficient for the Communist Parties to expose *unflinchingly* in their propaganda and agitation both on the parliamentary tribune and

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elsewhere the continually repeated offences in every capitalist state, in spite of all the “democratic” constitutions, against the equality of nations and the guaranteed rights of national minorities. It is also necessary first to clarify constantly the point that only the soviet order is capable of assuring nations true equality by uniting first the proletariat and then the whole mass of the toilers in the fight against the bourgeoisie, and secondly to give direct support to the revolutionary movements in dependent nations and those deprived of their rights, through the Communist Parties of the countries in question.

Without the last particularly important condition the struggle against the oppression of the dependent nations and the colonies and the recognition of their right to a separate political existence remains the kind of mendacious hypocrisy that we see in the parties of the Second International.

10. Recognizing internationalism in words alone and watering it down in practice with petty-bourgeois nationalism and pacifism is a common phenomenon not only among the parties of the Second International but also among those that have left the International. This phenomenon is frequently seen even in those parties that now call themselves Communist. The fight against this evil, against the most deeply-rooted petty-bourgeois nationalist prejudices, which appear in every possible form such as racial hatred, the baiting of minorities and antisemitism, must be brought all the more into the foreground the more burning becomes the question of transforming the dictatorship of the proletariat from a national dictatorship (i.e., a dictatorship existing only in one country and incapable of pursuing an independent international policy) into an international dictatorship of the proletariat in at least a few advanced countries which is capable of exercising a decisive influence on international politics. What petty-bourgeois nationalism means by internationalism is the mere recognition of the equality of nations (irrespective of the fact that such recognition is granted in words alone) which leaves national egoism untouched. Proletarian internationalism on the other hand demands: 1) the subordination of the interests of the proletarian struggle of the one country to the interests of this struggle on a world scale, and 2) the ability and the readiness on the part

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of the nation that carries out its victory over the bourgeoisie to make the greatest national sacrifice in order to overthrow international capitalism.

Therefore the first and most important task in those countries that are already completely capitalist and have workers' parties that really do represent a vanguard of the proletariat is to combat the petty-bourgeois pacifist distortions of the conceptions and policies of internationalism.

11. In relation to those states that have a more backward, predominantly feudal, patriarchal or peasant patriarchal character, special attention must be paid to the following points:

- a) All Communist Parties must support the revolutionary liberation movements in these countries by their deeds. The form the support should take must be discussed with the Communist Party of the country in question, should such a party exist. This obligation to offer active assistance affects in the first place the workers of those countries on which the backward countries are in a position of colonial or financial dependence.
- b) An unconditional struggle must be carried out against the reactionary and medieval influence of the clergy, the Christian missions, and similar elements.
- c) A struggle is necessary against Pan-Islamism, the Pan-Asiatic movement, and similar currents which try to tie the liberation struggle against European and American imperialism to the strengthening of the power of Turkish and Japanese imperialism, the nobility, the big landlords, the clergy, etc.
- d) Support for the peasant movement in the backward countries against the landowners and every form and remnant of feudalism is particularly necessary. What must be striven for above all is to give the peasant movement as revolutionary a character as possible and wherever possible to organize the peasants and all victims of exploitation in soviets and thus bring about as close a link as possible between the Western European communist proletariat and the revolutionary movement of peasants in the East, in the colonies, and in the backward countries.

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- e) A determined fight is necessary against the attempt to put a communist cloak around revolutionary liberation movements that are not really communist in the backward countries. The Communist International has the duty to support the revolutionary movement in the colonies only for the purpose of gathering the components of the future proletarian parties—communist in fact and not just in name in all the backward countries and training them to be conscious of their special tasks, the special tasks, that is to say, of fighting against the bourgeois-democratic tendencies within their own nation. The Communist International should accompany the revolutionary movement in the colonies and the backward countries for part of the way, should even make an alliance with it; it may not, however, fuse with it, but must unconditionally maintain the independent character of the proletarian movement, be it only in embryo.
- f) It is necessary continually to lay bare and to explain among the broadest masses of all, but in particular of the backward countries, the deception committed by the imperialist powers with the help of the privileged classes in the oppressed countries when, under the mask of politically independent states, they bring into being state structures that are economically, financially and militarily completely dependent on them. *The Zionists' Palestine affair can be characterized as a gross example of the deception of the working classes of that oppressed nation by Entente⁴ imperialism and the bourgeoisie of the country in question pooling their efforts (in the same way that Zionism in general actually delivers the Arab working population of Palestine, where Jewish workers only form a minority, to exploitation by England, under the cloak of the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine).*⁵ In today's economic conditions there is no salvation for the weak and dependent nations outside of an alliance with Soviet Republics.

12. The centuries of enslavement that the weak and colonial nationalities have suffered at the hands of the great imperialist powers has left in the

⁴ The Entente (originally in French *Entente Cordiale*, meaning "cordial agreement") was a military alliance primarily composed of France, Russia, and later Britain, along with other nations, which opposed the Central Powers during World War I.

⁵ Italics for emphasis are ours (*Material*).

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toiling masses of the enslaved countries not only a feeling of combativity but also a feeling of mistrust towards the nations that have exploited them in general, including the proletariat of those nations. The base betrayal of socialism by the majority of the official leaders of that Proletariat between 1914 and 1919, when the social patriots masked the defense of “their” bourgeoisie’s “rights” to enslave and plunder the financially dependent countries under “defense of the Fatherland”—this betrayal could only strengthen that completely justified mistrust. Since this mistrust and national prejudices can only be rooted out after the destruction of imperialism in the advanced countries and the radical transformation of the whole basis of economic life in the backward countries, the removal of these prejudices will only be able to proceed very slowly. This means that the class conscious communist proletariat of every country has the duty of giving special care and attention to national feelings, in themselves outdated, in those long-enslaved countries and nationalities, and at the same time the obligation to make concessions in order to overcome this mistrust and these prejudices all the more rapidly. Without the voluntary alliance of the proletariat and with them the toiling masses of every country and nation in the world united as one, the victory over capitalism cannot be drawn to a completely successful conclusion.

Some Excerpted Discussions on the Above Theses

Sultan-Zade (Persia): At most of its Congresses the Second International studied the colonial question and drew up choice resolutions on it which could never be put into practice. Very often these questions were debated and decisions taken without the participation of representatives of backward countries. What is more, when the first Persian revolution was suppressed by the Russian and English hangmen and the Persian Social Democracy turned for help to the European working class, which was at that time represented by the Second International, it was not even given the right to vote on a resolution on that question. Today at the Second Congress of the Communist International is the first time that this question has been dealt with thoroughly and moreover with the representatives of almost all the colonized or semi-colonized countries of the Orient and of America. The resolution adopted by our Commission completely fulfills the expectations of the laboring masses of the oppressed peoples and serves

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especially to stimulate and encourage the soviet movement in these countries. At first glance it may seem peculiar to speak of a soviet movement in completely or partially dependent countries. However, if we pay full attention to the social position of these countries our doubts disappear. Comrade Lenin has already talked about the experiences of the Russian Communist Party in Turkestan, among the Bashkir, and in Kirghizstan. If the soviet system is successfully ripening in these countries, the soviet movement must spread powerfully in India and Persia, that is to say in countries where the differentiation between the classes is proceeding with giant steps.

In 1870 all these countries were dominated by merchant capital. The position has only changed slightly. The colonial policies of the great powers turned these countries into markets and sources of raw materials for the great European centers by preventing the development of their national industries. The imports of European consumer goods into the colonies finished off native industry.

Although the rapid growth of capitalist industry quickly proletarianized the old mass of craft workers in the European countries and gave them a new ideology, this was not the case in the Orient, where conditions forced thousands of unfortunates to emigrate to Europe and America. In these colonized or semi-colonized countries there are also masses of peasants whose living conditions are almost impossible. The burden of taxes and dues falls mainly on this unfortunate part of the population throughout the Orient. Since the peasants are almost the only people who produce food, they have to feed the legions of merchants and exploiters, employers and tyrants. As a result of the oppression that bears down on them this suppressed class in the Orient has not been able to build a powerfully organized revolutionary party. A great diversity of demands can be observed among the ruling classes. The interests of the trading circles demand the continuation of the colonial policies of the great powers, while those of the bourgeoisie on the other hand are damaged by foreign intervention. While the priesthood protests against the import of goods from countries with different religious beliefs, the merchants on the other hand do not hesitate to ally themselves with those countries. There is no unity among the ruling classes, nor can there be.

These facts have created a revolutionary atmosphere, and the next storm

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of nationalism in these countries can quickly turn into a social revolution. That is in general the situation in the majority of Asian countries. Does it not follow from this that the fate of communism throughout the world depends on the victory of the social revolution in the East, as Comrade Roy assures you?⁶ Certainly not. Many comrades in Turkestan are caught up in this error. It is true that the behavior of the capitalists in the colonies awakens a revolutionary spirit. But it is just as true to say that through capitalist exploitation in the center a counter-revolutionary spirit is created among the labor aristocracy. Capitalism seeks consciously to hold up the revolution by trying to win small privileged layers of workers for itself. Let us assume that the communist revolution has begun in India. Will the workers of that country be able to withstand the attack by the bourgeoisie of the entire world without the help of a big revolutionary movement in England and Europe? Of course not. The suppression of the revolution in Persia and China is clear proof of the fact. If the revolutionaries in Turkey and Persia are now throwing down the gauntlet to omnipotent England, it is not because they themselves are now stronger, but because the imperialist bandits have become powerless. The revolution that has started in the West has also warmed the soil in Turkey and Persia and strengthened the revolutionaries.⁷ The epoch of the world revolution has begun.

Park Jin-sun (Korea): At the present moment we are discussing the colonial questions under conditions that are quite different from those at the time of the foundation of the Second International thirty years ago. The whole task of the Communist International in the colonial question consists in correcting the mistakes made by the leaders of the Second International. The whole history of the ignominious collapse of the Second

⁶ M. N. Roy was an Indian revolutionary who played a key role in the formation of the Communist International. The early 1920s "Lenin-Roy debate" revolved around their differing perspectives on the Comintern's anti-colonial policy, with Lenin advocating for a revolutionary overthrow of imperialism to achieve liberation, while Roy argued for a more gradual approach of collaboration with nationalist movements within the colonial context.

⁷ This is a reference to the nationalist Young Turk Revolution (1908) which was led by young officers in the Turkish army and resulted in a constitution and the modernization/secularization of the Turkish state. Unfortunately, the largest faction of the Young Turk revolution was the ultra-nationalist Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) that gained hegemony over the movement in 1908. The CUP was responsible for spearheading the Armenian Genocide.

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International has shown that the Western European proletariat cannot win the fight against its bourgeoisie as long as the bourgeoisie has a source of strength in the colonies.

The official leaders realized this; however, these ideologists of parliamentarism stood aloof from the heroic struggles of the colonial peoples, and whenever they approached the problem of the East, the problem of the colonial peoples, they trembled no less than the ideologists of the bourgeoisie. But here, at our Congress, the work of the Commission has already shown that all the delegates from the East as well as those of the Western European proletariat are conscious of the fact that the happy day—the day of the triumph of the Communist International, the day of the social revolution—will only dawn when all the colonial peoples rise in revolt, when the Western European proletariat deliver the death blow to their bourgeoisie, when the colonial peoples strike the bourgeoisie of the West to the heart. The consciousness of the necessity of a common struggle grew more and more, and Russia, the link between the whole proletarian West and the revolutionary East, has now really given us the opportunity to discuss the sore point that was the origin of opportunism, the origin of the indecision of the Second International. I hope that our Congress will now take decisions on the colonial question which will speed the revolutionary ferment, the revolution, in the East.

Connolly (Ireland):⁸ The Irish question can be considered as a question of national oppression from three standpoints: from the standpoint of the national revolutionary movement, from the standpoint of the petty-bourgeois social democrats and liberals, and from the standpoint of the Communist International. The first tendency considers Ireland as a separate national unit economically and politically oppressed by England over the last seven hundred years and sees the solution to the question purely and simply in the complete independence of Ireland from Great Britain. For that purpose however a bourgeois-democratic Irish state must be set up after the pattern of the democratic republics of Western Europe. In no

⁸ Roderick "Roddy" Connolly, the son of James Connolly, was an Irish socialist and political activist who followed in his father's footsteps, engaging in socialist and republican activities during the Irish struggle for independence and setting up the short-lived Communist Party of Ireland (1921-1924) and its successor, the Irish Workers' Party (1926-1927).

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other case could Ireland ever succeed in developing fully in the economic and cultural respect.

From the standpoint of the liberals, which is shared with slight differences by the petty-bourgeois social-democrats, Ireland is already economically and politically a part of Great Britain. Therefore it is sufficient to satisfy national demands by means of sensible political concessions within the framework of limited self-government.

Meanwhile this independence must be prevented from becoming a danger to the realm.

From the standpoint of the Communist International the position is very different. In the last phase of capitalism the position of all national minorities and colonies is exceptionally complicated. Among the majority of these oppressed peoples and races there is a revolutionary movement directed against imperialism. Even if the struggle of the Communist International is proceeding in another direction, it cannot simply turn its back on these revolutionary uprisings, whose purpose also is to free themselves from imperialism. It must rather support every movement that can contribute to the advancement of the world revolution. The Communist International must encourage and support every movement that strives to weaken the imperialist powers and to advance the growing world revolution. The Communist International must strengthen and unite all communist groups involved in such struggles. Such policies would lead to the formation of a Communist Party in which, under the pressure of the military dictatorship of imperialism, a strict centralization and a good discipline develop, and which thus will be rendered capable of carrying on a bitter struggle for power against its own national bourgeoisie, after liberating itself from the imperialist yoke. Taking these circumstances into account we demand the support of national revolutionary movements by the Communist International. The only means which promise success is the active support of national movements with the help of the communist groups in the countries in question, however weak they may be. This is especially true of Ireland, where support for the national movement by the Communist International and its British section, without the inclusion of communist groups, would only weaken the latter. Support by the Communist International is the only means that permits them, even in the very first stages of revolutionary struggle, to play a significant role.

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In their struggle against British imperialism the Irish nationalists will use any means, and if the struggle of the Communist International is only carried out through the mediation of the little communist groups I have mentioned, the nationalists will be forced to remain neutral towards the communists, who will meanwhile be able to develop and attract new forces. Indeed, they may perhaps have to support these communist groups actively, thus unconsciously making their propaganda easier.

If there was no communist movement in Ireland, the direct result, regardless of whether it remained subject to the military dictatorship ruling it at the moment or formed a bourgeois state, would be that it would be turned into the basis for the counter-revolutionary attack on the coming social revolution in Britain. And here we must pay particular attention to the fact that in the British struggles the fleet would play no small role, and that Ireland possesses splendid harbors and submarine bases for a white fleet destined to blockade Britain. This takes us back to the first part of our report which considered Ireland's strategic position in its importance for communism. If we consider the international situation as a bitter struggle between the center of the world revolution, Soviet Russia, with the small states grouped around Russia on the one hand, and the League of Nations led by British imperialism on the other, then Ireland, that constant hearth of revolution in the heart of the empire, which keeps an English army of 200,000 men permanently occupied, is of great importance for the international revolutionary movement. On the other hand we must strain every nerve to prevent Ireland from being converted into a kind of basis for the hangmen of the English revolution in the sense that we mentioned above.

İsmail Hakkı Pasha (Turkey): I would like to talk about Comrade Lenin's Theses, particularly the part that deals with Islam. This is precisely a question which demands that one should become more closely acquainted with it. From the time when the Turkish Sultans conquered Syria and Assyria, when the road to the holy places of Islam fell into their hands, from that time on those in power in Turkey have striven to unite all those peoples living in the East, Africa and other countries who are followers of Islam. From the time when the holy places and particularly the railway fell into the hands of the Sultans, from the time when the heart of Islam fell into their hands, the Turkish Sultans have preached every kind of Pan-Is-

Excerpts from the 2nd Congress of the 3rd International

lamism and have tried to unite around Turkey all the Muslim peoples and countries in the East and in Africa.

When however the Young Turk revolt broke out in 1908, power passed into the hands of the Young Turks. The liberal bourgeoisie which took power into its hands began to seek new ways to unite all these peoples. At the same time, in Russia, the Tartars, the Turkestanis, the Bashkirs and a whole series of other peoples were groaning under the czarist knout,⁹ and here at the same time the idea of Pan-Turkism emerged, which was opposed to Pan-Islamism. Pan-Islamism was unable to unite all the different nationalities with their different languages. The idea of Pan-Turkism which the Young Turks later took over, this idea strove to fuse all the Turkish peoples from Kazan to Turkestan and to the Caucasus with the whole of Turkey and a part of Persia. The endeavor of the Young Turks was to unify this huge territory. But all these dreams were condemned to remain on paper.

After the Russian Revolution and the partition of Turkey by the European imperialists, when the Janus face¹⁰ of the English and French capitalists showed itself openly to the Turkish people, a new movement began in Turkey, a liberation movement. The Anatolian movement, which is now led by the Democratic Party, is the best answer to the ruthless exploitation to which Turkey was subjected by the countries of the Entente. The occupation of Constantinople¹¹ particularly poured oil on the flames and the movement grew even faster. Now the revolutionary state in Anatolia, which is gathering around itself all the forces hostile to the Entente which are driven by a century-old hatred of imperialism, is preparing for the struggle against European imperialism. The toilers of Turkey will not permit themselves to be enslaved once more by the Entente, and thanks to the Russian revolution, which is the best friend of toiling Turkey, the Turkish people will very shortly achieve complete freedom and, together

⁹ A knout is a type of whip historically used for corporal punishment, particularly in Russia, consisting of a long lash with a handle, often embedded with metal. It is used here as a synonym to "yoke."

¹⁰ The expression "Janus-faced" refers to someone or something displaying two contrasting or contradictory aspects or qualities simultaneously, like the two faces of the Roman god Janus, who was depicted with two faces looking in opposite directions.

¹¹ Former name of the city of Istanbul in Turkey.

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with the toilers of every country, take up the struggle against imperialism throughout the world.

Esther Frumkin (General Jewish Labour Bund):¹² I think that the national minorities, that is to say minorities who occupy a specific territory, must also be taken into account. I am amazed to see repeated here the error which the Second International permitted itself to make. Territorial autonomy is talked about and national minorities are not taken into account. I think that the national minorities in different countries ought to be taken into account. I propose to make an addendum to point 9. Before that however I think that the experience of the Communist Party and of the soviet order in Russia ought to be remembered. The organizations of the Communist Party of Russia and the soviet institutions possess special departments for national minorities which are concerned with the national minorities and everything to do with for example the Jewish question, etc. I propose the following addendum on page 43 at the end of the Thesis, before point 10:

At the same time the Communist Parties in every country must carry out a decisive struggle, not only in their propaganda but also in their general policies, against the bourgeois concept of the exclusive right of this or that national majority to possess the territory they inhabit and against the concept held by national socialists who consider the national majority as absolute rulers and treat extra-territorial national minorities of workers who live on their territories as foreigners (Poland, the Ukraine).

Unless the categorical demand of the practical exercise of the rights of the national minorities living in various countries is assured (rights which can only be absolutely guaranteed by the dictatorship of the proletariat), the unconditional support of the revolutionary tendencies in oppressed countries with variegated populations could turn the previously oppressed petty-bourgeois masses into oppressors.

The experience of the soviet power and of the Communist Party of Russia, which gives the working masses of all nations the

¹² Esther Frumkin was a Belarusian revolutionary, publicist, and Soviet politician who led the General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia.

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true opportunity to develop intellectually, thanks to the great ramification of the organs of state (sections for the education of national minorities, Commissariats for National Affairs, etc.), whereby a truly fraternal co-existence between all nations is achieved, must form the basis of the national program valid for all Communist Parties.

One is tempted to regard all extra-territorial minorities as foreigners. That is what it is like in Poland and the Ukraine. It is important for every country to take as its example the Communist Party of Russia, which gives all the toiling minorities of every nationality the opportunity to develop culturally by placing the necessary organizations at their disposal, such as for example organizations for the enlightenment of national minorities and Commissariats to defend the interests of national minorities.

This example must be taken into consideration by every Communist Party during the discussion of the national question.

I also propose to add in the same 11th Thesis, page 46, under the heading (g) section 6 after the words “in these countries” the following words: “as also in those where a struggle by the national minorities to extend their rights is taking place.”

Section 6 after the words “the backward countries” add: “and nations.”
After section 6 the following comment:

An example will show what lies the working masses of an oppressed nationality have had to fall victim to, lies which are great assets to the Entente and to the bourgeoisie of the nations in question. *This is the case of the Zionists in Palestine who, under the pretext of founding an independent Jewish state, suppress the working population and the Arabs who live in Palestine under the British yoke, although the Jews are still the minority there.*

This unparalleled lie must be combated, and in a very energetic way, since the Zionists in every country work by approaching all the backward masses of Jewish workers and trying to create groups of work-

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ers with Zionist tendencies (Poale Zion),¹³ which have recently been striving to adopt a Communist turn of phrase.

I would like to quote here one of the most striking examples of the Zionist movement.

In Palestine we are not dealing with a population whose majority is Jewish. We are dealing with a mere minority which is trying to subjugate the majority of the workers in the country to the capital of the Entente.

We must combat these efforts in the most energetic way. The Zionists are seeking to win supporters in every country, and through their agitation and their propaganda serve the interests of the capitalist class. The Communist International must combat this movement in the most energetic way.¹⁴

¹³ Poale Zion [Workers of Zion] was a Zionist organization that adopted some Marxist elements, formed in 1901 several years after the Jewish Labor Bund rejected Zionism. David Ben-Gurion, a key architect of the modern state of Israel, was one of its members. Although at least one of their representatives attended the Second Congress of the Third International, the organization was ultimately barred from joining the International due to their ideology, rejecting the conditions of admission. Already embedded in the settler movement by the time of this congress, Poale Zion was eventually declared an enemy of the workers' movement by the Comintern in 1922.

¹⁴ Italics for emphasis are ours (*Material*).

Lenin and the War

Part 2

T. Derbent

The first part of the article “Lenin and the War” appeared in the first issue of *Material* (October 2023), and covers sections 1 and 2. This second and final part includes sections 3 and 4 of the article. This entire text is included in the recently published *Clausewitz et la guerre populaire* (“Clausewitz and the People’s War”), which will be released in English by Foreign Languages Press in 2024.

Part 3: War and Revolution

3.1 War and Revolution

The relationship between (imperialist) war and (proletarian) revolution lies at the heart of Lenin’s experience, beginning from his analyses of the Russo-Japanese (1905) and Balkan (1912–1913) wars. This relationship takes two forms:

1. Imperialist war is, if not primarily, at least secondarily, an instrument of counter-revolution. Ideologically, positions based on class struggle and aiming at the unity of the international workers’ movement are attacked by nationalist and chauvinist propaganda.

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On a practical level, the state of war is used to break up the class' political and trade union organizations.

2. In an opposite sense (but dialectically linked), imperialist war exacerbates contradictions with its trail of massacres, forced labor, misery, and destruction.

Historically, the international workers' movement focused on the first aspect. The struggle against war was a humanitarian imperative, but also, for the Second International, a prerequisite for following the "tried and tested tactic":¹ time, the course of history, historical determinism, the development of capitalism and its contradictions, all played in favor of socialism. Since the peaceful progress of the workers' movement seemed irresistible, they rationalized that preserving the peace meant certain victory. Lenin's 1907 speech at the International Congress in Stuttgart, where social-democratic leaders were looking for ways to prevent war, was surprising in that he argued that the aim should not only be to prevent war, but also, if necessary, to use the crisis caused by war to overthrow the bourgeoisie. By envisaging the role of war as a catalyst of social contradictions, Lenin distanced himself from those who saw war only as a catastrophe for the workers' movement. His amendment offended the International's right-wing leadership. Bebel feared that such a revolutionary declaration could give rise to lawsuits and had it reworded in legally unassailable but ambiguous terms.

Yet Lenin did not theorize that war was necessarily favorable to the revolutionary process. He distanced himself from Radek and the German extreme left, for whom "the convulsions of war" were the shortest route to revolution. Lenin believed that wars were inevitable due to the development of imperialism, but it was the concrete historical conditions, which were extremely difficult to untangle, that would determine whether a war would be a brake or a gas pedal of the class struggle: the latter would sharpen revolutionary contradictions, the former would drag the workers' movement backwards. What is important for Lenin is that the goal of the Revolution be maintained in war: "the masses will realize the need for

¹ "The tried and tested tactic" ("die alte bewährte Taktik" in German) was an expression used in revolutionary circles at the turn of the last century to mockingly refer to the reformist path advocated by the Social Democratic parties of the time.—Ed.

revolutionary action in connection with the crises which war inevitably involves.”² At the Zimmerwald and Khienthal conferences, he waged a two-pronged battle: outwardly, against the Social-Chauvinists who had rallied their bourgeoisie, and inwardly, against the Zimmerwaldists who had no other objective than peace, immediate peace, peace without annexation. This pacifist line prevailed in Zimmerwald—even Clara Zetkin and Angelica Balabanov adhered to it,³ while Lenin’s revolutionary thesis received only seven or eight votes out of forty mandates.

But Lenin didn’t wait for Zimmerwald to denounce pacifism:

War is no chance happening, no “sin” as is thought by Christian priests (who are no whit behind the opportunists in preaching patriotism, humanity, and peace), but an inevitable stage of capitalism, just as legitimate a form of the capitalist way of life as peace is. Present-day war is a people’s war. What follows from this truth is not that we must swim with the “popular” current of chauvinism, but that the class contradictions dividing the nations continue to exist in wartime and manifest themselves in conditions of war. Refusal to serve with the forces, anti-war strikes, etc. are sheer nonsense, the miserable and cowardly dream of an unarmed struggle against the armed bourgeoisie, vain yearning for the destruction of capitalism without a desperate civil war or a series of wars. It is the duty of every socialist to conduct propaganda of the class struggle, in the army as well; work directed towards turning a war of the nations into civil war is the only socialist activity in the era of an imperialist armed conflict of the bourgeoisie of all nations. Down with mawkishly sanctimonious and fatuous appeals for “peace at any price!” Let us raise high the banner of civil war!⁴

² V. I. Lenin, “The International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart,” first published in *Proletary*, no. 17, October 20, 1907. In Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 13 (Moscow: Progress Publishers).

³ A number of Zimmerwaldian pacifists eventually rallied behind Lenin’s positions and became, if not the founders of the Communist Party in their own country, at least the defenders of Soviet Russia in the socialist movement in the West.

⁴ V. I. Lenin, “The Position and Tasks of the Socialist International,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974).

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3.2. Kautsky's *The Road to Power*

Lenin was horrified by Kautsky's reversal at the outbreak of the First World War. The 1907 Stuttgart resolution (confirmed in Copenhagen in 1910 and Basel in 1912) obliged socialists in the event of war

to secure the speediest termination of wars that have already begun [and] utilize the crisis created by the war to hasten the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.⁵

In the *Neue Zeit* of October 2, 1914, Kautsky wrote:

If it comes to war, every nation has to defend itself as best it can. It follows that Social-Democrats of all nations have an equal right or an equal duty to take part in this defense; none should hurl reproaches at another.⁶

In short: proletarians of all countries, kill each other. . . .

Lenin's unbridled hatred of "the renegade Kautsky" can be explained by the role Kautsky had played in defining proletarian policy on war: as early as 1887, in an article in the *Neue Zeit* entitled "The Modern Nationality," Kautsky had laid the foundations for a Marxist theory of the national question and its interaction with the social question. He intervened several times on these issues (notably in 1886 and 1905). In 1907, with the threat of war looming over the Moroccan crisis,⁷ he published a pamphlet entitled "Patriotism and Social-Democracy," in which he rejected any "Sacred Union"⁸ between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie: "At the present

⁵ V. I. Lenin, "The International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart," in *Collected Works*, vol. 13.

⁶ K. Kautsky, "Social-Democracy in the War," first published in the *Neue Zeit*, October 2, 1914. Source of the English translation used here: V. I. Lenin, "To Alexandra Kollontai," in *Collected Works*, vol. 36 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971).

⁷ Rival claims to Morocco by France and Germany—one of Africa's last independent states—brought the two countries to the brink of war in 1905. The crisis was not resolved until 1911, when Germany renounced all claims to Morocco in exchange for a 272,000 km² enlargement of its Cameroon colony at the expense of neighboring French colonies.

⁸ "Sacred Union" signifies temporary class collaboration orchestrated by the ruling bourgeoisie to maintain power and suppress dissent. It refers to the consensus among French political parties during World War I.—Ed.

time the conflicts between states can bring no war that proletarian interests would not, as a matter of duty, energetically oppose.”⁹

In 1909, Kautsky himself tackled the question of the war-revolution correlation in a work that Lenin was to put forward:¹⁰ *The Road to Power*. From the moment of its publication, this pamphlet was a central reference for Lenin—and never ceased to be so. And even if in October 1914, Lenin wrote to Shliapnikov: “I hate and despise Kautsky now more than anyone, with his vile, dirty, self-satisfied hypocrisy,”¹¹ he wrote four days later: “Make sure of getting and rereading (or get someone to translate to you) Kautsky’s *Weg zur Macht* [*The Road to Power*—what he wrote there about the revolution of our times!! And what a scoundrel he has become now, renouncing all this!”¹²

Kautsky considered that revolution could be produced by war in three different scenarios:

1. When the country that is on the losing side in the war, wanting to throw all national forces into the balance, calls the proletariat to come to power;
2. When the defeated army, exhausted, turns against the government, and the people rise up to put an end to a disastrous war;
3. When the army and the people rise up against a government that has signed a disgraceful peace.

According to Kautsky, after a generation of stability and progress, Europe and the world were entering a new period of war and revolution of unprecedented magnitude (due to its global dimension and advances in technology, trade, and communications). These upheavals would give rise

⁹ K. Kautsky, “Patriotism and Social Democracy,” first published in the *Neue Zeit*, 1907. Source of the English translation used here: Rosa Luxemburg, *The Crisis in the German Social-Democracy (The “Junius” Pamphlet)* (New York: The Socialist Publication Society, 1919), 104.

¹⁰ In *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, Lenin opposed Kautsky’s anti-Soviet positions with his own writings, particularly *The Road to Power*, written “when Kautsky was still a Marxist” (chapter “What is Internationalism?”), which stated that “the era of revolutions has begun.” In *The State and Revolution*, even as he berates Kautsky, he writes that this pamphlet is also his best.

¹¹ V. I. Lenin, “Letter to Alexander Shliapnikov,” October 27, 1914, in *Collected Works*, vol. 35.

¹² V. I. Lenin, “To A. G. Shliapnikov,” October 31, 1914, in *Collected Works*, vol. 35.

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to socialist revolutions in Europe, as well as revolutions towards democracy and national liberation in subjugated countries. This transition from a non-revolutionary to a revolutionary situation would require radically new tactics. In this sense, when the sharpening of class antagonisms would come to demonstrate the need for socialist revolution, any form of class collaboration would be tantamount to political suicide:

It is to ask the Socialists to commit political suicide to demand that they join in any coalition or “bloc” policy, in any case where the words “reactionary mass” are truly applicable. It is demanding moral suicide of the Socialists to ask them to enter into an alliance with capitalist parties at a time when these have prostituted themselves and compromised themselves to the very bottom.¹³

The interplay between socialist, democratic (i.e., against absolutist monarchies), national, and anti-colonial revolutions implies the rejection of simplistic models in which “advanced” countries show the way to “backward” ones. Kautsky argued that in Russia and the subjugated countries of the East, the interaction of different forms of revolution could open up new paths.¹⁴

The SPD was so undermined by opportunism that the first version of Kautsky’s pamphlet was discarded on Bebel’s orders, because it asserted that “no one would be so naive as to assert that we can pass imperceptibly and without a battle from the military state and absolutism into democracy.”¹⁵ Kautsky agreed to rewrite his pamphlet, removing anything that might provoke a lawsuit, while retaining its revolutionary character:

it is necessary to make clear, what has so often been stated before, that we are not discussing the question of whether labor legislation and similar laws in the interest of the proletariat and unions and co-operatives are necessary and useful or not. There are no

¹³ K. Kautsky, *The Road to Power* (Chicago: Samuel A. Bloch, 1909).

¹⁴ According to Lars T. Lih, however, not only did Kautsky (who believed in the ability of the workers’ movement to prevent war, if only because of the fear the movement would inspire among the bourgeoisie) consider these eventualities unlikely, he also felt that basing a strategy on them would be tantamount to adventurism. Lars T. Lih, “Lénine en 1914, La ‘nouvelle époque de guerre et révolution’” (“Lenin in 1914, The ‘New Epoch of War and Revolution’”).

¹⁵ K. Kautsky, *The Road to Power*.

two opinions among us on that point. What is disputed is the view that the exploited class, who control the power of the state, will permit such a development of these factors, as will amount to abolishing capitalist oppression, without first making such a resistance, with all the means at its disposal, that it can be abolished only through a decisive battle.¹⁶

In short, as Lenin summed up:

In 1909 Kautsky voiced the undisputed opinion held by all revolutionary Social-Democrats when he said that revolution in Europe cannot now be *premature* and that war means revolution.¹⁷

3.3. *The Transformation of Imperialist War into Civil War*

At its outset, the First World War effectively brought the labor movement to a halt; in July 1914, there had been a surge of political strikes in Russia, with insurrectionary demonstrations, which were interrupted by the declaration of war a month later. Bolshevik deputies who had voted against war credits in the Duma were deported to Siberia, and most businesses came under army control and surveillance. All the hard-won labor rights acquired since the beginning of the century were “suspended” for the duration of the conflict.¹⁸

However, as early as the summer of 1914, in the midst of chauvinist hysteria, Lenin, confident that reactionary propaganda would dissipate in the face of the misery caused by the war, endeavored to “transform the imperialist war into a civil war.”

Georges Haupt points out that the study of Lenin’s writings is complicated by the fact that they blend the demands of revolutionary pedagogy with those of tactical maneuvering.¹⁹ Haupt asserts, for example, that the

¹⁶ K. Kautsky, *The Road to Power*.

¹⁷ V. I. Lenin, “Dead Chauvinism and Living Socialism,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 21.

¹⁸ Rémi Adam, *La première guerre mondiale : Dix millions de morts pour un repartage du monde* (“World War I: Ten million dead for a redivision of the world”) (Pantin: Les bons caractères, 2010), 78.

¹⁹ Georges Haupt, “Guerre et révolution chez Lénine” (“War and Revolution in Lenin’s Thought”), first published in *Revue française de sciences politiques*, no. 2 (1971), reprinted in *L’historien et le mouvement social* (“The Historian and the Social Movement”) (Paris: Maspéro, 1980).

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slogan of “transforming the imperialist war into a civil war” changed in character in the course of the war:

1. In 1914, as a simple reaffirmation of revolutionary principles in the face of the opportunism of the Second International and the Mensheviks, but without any real possibility of realizing such a goal;
2. At the time of Zimmerwald and Kienthal, as a practical possibility;
3. In 1917, as an immediate and tangible objective.

Haupt’s thesis is questionable. As early as 1914, Lenin gave concrete content to this slogan. He knew that the time for civil war had not yet come, but more than a principle to be reaffirmed, it was a concrete objective requiring concrete organization and concrete action, namely

[an] all-embracing propaganda, involving the army and the theater of hostilities as well, for the socialist revolution and the need to use weapons, not against their brothers, the wage slaves in other countries, but against the reactionary and bourgeois governments and parties of all countries; the urgent necessity of organizing illegal nuclei and groups in the armies of all nations, to conduct such propaganda in all languages; a merciless struggle against the chauvinism and “patriotism” of the philistines and bourgeoisie of all countries without exception. In the struggle against the leaders of the present International, who have betrayed socialism, it is imperative to appeal to the revolutionary consciousness of the working masses, who bear the entire burden of the war and are in most cases hostile to opportunism and chauvinism.²⁰

In reality, it was a strategic project from the outset. It was based on theory, on objective and subjective conditions (as they were and as they were bound to evolve), but also—and this was overlooked by Haupt—on the historical precedents of the Paris Commune and the 1905 Revolution. These two great experiences of revolutionary civil war, to which Lenin referred so many times, had each emerged from an imperialist war: the Franco-German War of 1870 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1905.

²⁰ V. I. Lenin, “The Tasks of Revolutionary Social-Democracy in the European War,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 21.

As early as 1914, Lenin concretely foresaw the prospect of transforming imperialist war into civil war:

The bourgeoisie is duping the masses by disguising imperialist rapine with the old ideology of a “national war.” This deceit is being shown up by the proletariat, which has brought forward its slogan of turning the imperialist war into a civil war. This was the slogan of the Stuttgart and Basel resolutions, which had in mind, not war in general, but precisely the present war and spoke, not of “defense of the fatherland,” but of “hastening the downfall of capitalism,” of utilizing the war-created crisis for this purpose, and of the example provided by the Paris Commune. The latter was an instance of a war of nations being turned into a civil war.

Of course, such a conversion is no easy matter and cannot be accomplished at the whim of one party or another. That conversion, however, is inherent in the objective conditions of capitalism in general, and of the period of the end of capitalism in particular. It is in that direction, and that direction alone, that socialists must conduct their activities. It is not their business to vote for war credits or to encourage chauvinism in their “own” country (and allied countries), but primarily to strive against the chauvinism of their “own” bourgeoisie, without confining themselves to legal forms of struggle when the crisis has matured and the bourgeoisie has itself taken away the legality it has created. Such is the line of action that *leads* to civil war, and will bring about civil war at one moment or another of the European conflagration.²¹

As we can see, it’s not a question of preparing for the possibility of civil war but of following a line of action that leads to it. In this context, Lenin’s thinking is in tune with reality; he is on the lookout for developments, backlashes, and runaway processes, as well as their concrete manifestations. He mentions, for example, a phenomenon that was unknown during the Russo-Japanese War of 1905: fraternization in the trenches:

²¹ V. I. Lenin, “The Position and Tasks of the Socialist International,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 21.

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Clearly, this path tends to develop, strengthen, and consolidate fraternal confidence between the workers of different countries. Clearly, this path is *beginning to wreck* the hateful discipline of the barrack prisons, the discipline of blind obedience of the soldier to “his” officers and generals, to his capitalists (for most of the officers and generals either belong to the capitalist class or protect its interests). Clearly, fraternization is the revolutionary initiative of the *masses*, it is the awakening of the conscience, the mind, the courage of the oppressed classes; in other words, it is a rung in the ladder leading up to the socialist proletarian revolution.

In order that fraternization achieve the goal we set it more easily, surely and rapidly, we must see to it that it is well organized and has a clear political program.

In our appeal to the soldiers of all the belligerent countries we have set forth our program for a workers’ revolution in all countries, namely, the transfer of all state power to the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies.

Comrades, soldiers, discuss this program among yourselves and with the German soldiers.²²

Moreover, Lenin saw to it that leaflets for soldiers were published in Russian and German and that joint meetings were organized with interpreters, etc.²³ The Bolsheviks massively distributed a “Trench Pravda”²⁴ calling for fraternization.

Disentangling the tactical from the ideological aspects of a situation proved an almost impossible task for Lenin, who took this art to the highest level: the art of going back and forth dialectically between theory and practice, synthesizing this dialectic into a strategy that was flexible because

²² V. I. Lenin, “The Significance of Fraternization,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 24.

²³ V. I. Lenin, “Petrograd City RSDLP(b) Conference” (April 14–22, 1917), in *Collected Works*, vol. 41.

²⁴ The *Trench Pravda* (“*Okopnaia Pravda*” in Russian) was a clandestine newspaper produced by Bolshevik activists and soldiers during World War I. It aimed to disseminate Bolshevik propaganda and agitate for socialist revolution among soldiers fighting in the trenches. The “Trench Pravda” played a crucial role in Bolshevik efforts to undermine support for the Provisional Government and the war effort, advocating instead for an end to the conflict and the establishment of a socialist state.—Ed.

it was solid—solid because it was flexible—and formulating it for polemical, agitation, and propaganda purposes. If we fail to grasp the depth and richness of this dialectic, we come to speak of Lenin either as an obtuse ideologue hacking away at the century to make it conform to his ideal, or, on the contrary, as an absolute empiricist constantly changing line and discourse whenever it served his purposes.

Part 4: The Revolutionary War

4.1. *Insurrection*

Lenin's interest in military questions was also closely linked to the military dimension of the revolutionary struggle. As early as January 1905, before the wave of insurrections struck Russia, the Bolsheviks set about building up a military organization. At the Second London Congress (April 12–27, 1905), a Military-Technical Bureau was set up under the supervision of the Central Committee, and local committees were instructed to draw up an insurrectionary plan and prepare for its implementation.

The 1905 wave of insurrections nevertheless surprised the RSDLP, which had no real military apparatus and no military doctrine other than Engels' writings on insurrection. The Military-Technical Bureau did its utmost to raise the level of the revolutionary struggle of the masses by carrying out intelligence operations, actions against the regime's leaders and forces, and expropriations as a way of financing the whole, but its forces and the impact of its actions were insufficient. The Bolsheviks—and Lenin in particular—immediately set about learning from experience to improve the effectiveness of their fighting groups. In October, Lenin wrote to the Combat Organization:

It horrifies me—I give you my word—it horrifies me to find that there has been talk about bombs for over six months, yet not one has been made! . . . Go to the youth. Form fighting squads *at once* everywhere, among the students, and *especially among the workers*, etc., etc. Let groups be at once organized of three, ten, thirty, etc., persons. Let them arm themselves at once as best they can, be it with a revolver, a knife, a rag soaked in kerosene for starting fires, etc. Let these detachments at once select leaders, and as far as possible *contact* the Combat Committee of the St. Petersburg

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Committee. Do not demand any formalities, and, for heaven's sake, forget all these schemes, and send all "functions, rights, and privileges" to the devil. Do not make membership in the RSDLP an absolute condition—that would be an absurd demand for an armed uprising. Do not refuse to contact any group, even if it consists of only three persons; make it the one sole condition that it should be reliable as far as police spying is concerned and prepared to fight the czar's troops.²⁵

In her memoirs, N. K. Krupskaya recalls Lenin's application to the study of military art:

He had given more thought to this than people know, and his talk about fighting squads in partisan war, about the squads of "five and ten," was not just the idle talk of a layman, but a well-thought-out plan.²⁶

In January 1905, Lenin had reread Marx's articles on insurrection and translated the chapter on street fighting in the memoirs of Cluseret, the general of the Paris Commune. Cluseret's memoirs were published in *Vperiod* with a preface and biographical note written by Lenin.²⁷

On December 5, the Moscow Bolshevik conference unanimously decided to proclaim an insurrectionary general strike, followed on December 7 by the Moscow Soviet (composed of a majority of Bolsheviks). The strike and demonstrations turned into an armed confrontation, but the Bolshevik-minority Joint Council of Volunteer Fighting Squads²⁸ proved incapable of acting as the insurrectionary headquarters. The Moscow workers resisted, but only 8,000 of them were militarily organized. The RSDLP tried to help

²⁵ V. I. Lenin, "To the Combat Committee of the St. Petersburg Committee," in *Collected Works*, vol. 9.

²⁶ N. K. Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959).

²⁷ V. I. Lenin, "Street Fighting (The Advice of a General of the Commune)," in *Collected Works*, vol. 8.

²⁸ Created in Moscow at the end of October 1905 to resist the ultra-nationalist Black Hundred movement, it brought together representatives of the party's combat groups from the Moscow Committee of the RSDLP, the Moscow Social Democratic Group, the Moscow Committee of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, and other combat groups. It was controlled by the Revolutionary Socialists and Mensheviks.

the insurrection in every way possible (notably by trying to stop the trains taking the troops to Moscow²⁹), but on December 18, their last entrenched fighters fell in the Presnia district to the west of the city.

For the Mensheviks, starting with Plekhanov, the lesson drawn from the 1905 surge of the revolutionary movement, and particularly from the Moscow insurrection, was that it was a “tactical folly” of “incredible lightness.”³⁰ But the Bolsheviks, even after the defeats in Moscow, Donetsk, and Rostov, declared that the problem was the lack of forces and organizational, military, and doctrinal preparation:

Thus, nothing could be more short-sighted than Plekhanov’s view, seized upon by all the opportunists, that the strike was untimely and should not have been started, and that “they should not have taken to arms.” On the contrary, we should have taken to arms more resolutely, energetically and aggressively; we should have explained to the masses that it was impossible to confine things to a peaceful strike and that a fearless and relentless armed fight was necessary. And now we must at last openly and publicly admit that political strikes are inadequate; we must carry on the widest agitation among the masses in favor of an armed uprising and make no attempt to obscure this question by talk about “preliminary stages,” or to befog it in any way. We would be deceiving both ourselves and the people if we concealed from the masses the necessity of a desperate, bloody war of extermination, as the immediate task of the coming revolutionary action.³¹

Lenin also drew tactical lessons similar to those outlined by Kautsky in “Prospects of the Russian Revolution.” The fact that the Moscow insurgents offered such resistance to the regime’s elite troops shows that Engels’ condemnation of the barricade struggle needed to be refined, that it was a particular kind of barricade tactic that he condemned because of the

²⁹ Lenin discusses the importance of the railway workers’ situation in the event of insurrection in “The Dissolution of the Duma and the Tasks of the Proletariat,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 11.

³⁰ Plekhanov made these judgments in Nos. 3 and 4 of the *Dnevnik Sotsial-Demokrata* (“Diary of a Social-Democrat”) he edited in Geneva, condemning the insurrection and calling for “more dedicated attention to the workers’ trade-union movement.”

³¹ V. I. Lenin, “Lessons of the Moscow Uprising,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 9.

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appearance of the cannon, and so on. However, a new tactic could be formulated from the Moscow experience.

The lessons drawn from this experience led to the insurrectionary doctrine put into practice in October 1917. This doctrine was no longer based on the barricade struggle or spontaneous mass demonstrations but on concerted, planned offensive actions carried out by trained and disciplined units of armed workers,³² on the mastery of military techniques,³³ and on the fragmentation of the bourgeois army through agitation and propaganda.³⁴ Lastly, this doctrine was founded on a precise analysis of the objective and subjective conditions required for its implementation: political crisis of the system, mass dissatisfaction, the existence of a recognized

³² "Volunteer fighting units, composed of 'druzhinniki,' if we adopt the name made so honorable by the great December days in Moscow, will be of tremendous value at the moment of the outbreak. A 'druzhina,' or volunteer squad, that can shoot will be able to disarm a policeman or suddenly attack a patrol and thus procure arms. A volunteer squad which cannot shoot, or which has not procured arms, will assist in building barricades, reconnoitering, organizing liaisons, setting ambushes for the enemy, setting fire to houses occupied by the enemy, occupying rooms to serve as bases for the insurgents—in short, thousands of the most diverse functions can be performed by voluntary units of persons who are determined to fight to the last gasp, who know the locality well, who are most closely connected with the population." (V. I. Lenin, "The Dissolution of the Duma and the Tasks of the Proletariat," in *Collected Works*, vol. 11.)

³³ "Military tactics depend on the level of military technique. This plain truth Engels demonstrated and brought home to all Marxists. Military technique today is not what it was in the middle of the nineteenth century. It would be folly to contend against artillery in crowds and defend barricades with revolvers. . . . There have been new advances in military technique in the very recent period. The Japanese War produced the hand grenade. The small-arms factories have placed automatic rifles on the market. Both these weapons are already being successfully used in the Russian Revolution but to a degree that is far from adequate. We can and must take advantage of improvements in technique, teach the workers' detachments to make bombs in large quantities, help them and our fighting squads to obtain supplies of explosives, fuses and automatic rifles." (V. I. Lenin, "Lessons of the Moscow Uprising," in *Collected Works*, vol. 9.)

³⁴ "Unless the revolution assumes a mass character and affects the troops, there can be no question of serious struggle. That we must work among the troops goes without saying. But we must not imagine that they will come over to our side at one stroke, as a result of persuasion or their own convictions. The Moscow uprising clearly demonstrated how stereotyped and lifeless this view is. As a matter of fact, the wavering of the troops, which is inevitable in every truly popular movement, leads to a real *fight for the troops* whenever the revolutionary struggle becomes acute." (V. I. Lenin, "Lessons of the Moscow Uprising," in *Collected Works*, vol. 9.)

revolutionary vanguard, and peasant support for proletarian revolution. This doctrine presupposes a long process of preparation, accumulation, and qualification of military forces. The final act—insurrection—is preceded by a long politico-military phase, examined at length by Lenin in *The Partisan War*. This doctrine attributes three roles to armed struggle: a subjective role of political mobilization of activists and the masses; a role of accumulation of forces in non-revolutionary periods; and the final, decisive role of armed insurrection.

4.2. Partisan War

Lenin had to lead the battle against Plekhanov, who wanted to dissolve the combat groups and conduct politics solely through the actions of elected members of the Duma. In spite of this, the Bolsheviks approved and practiced bank robberies (the earnings from which were needed to run an underground party) and armed action against members of the repressive apparatus, particularly spies.

A school for military instructors was set up in Kiev, and another was opened in Lemberg to teach bomb use. In November 1906, Lenin had the Military-Technical Bureau convene a conference of combat groups in Tammersfor,³⁵ Finland. In preparation for this conference, Yaroslavsky, one of the leading Bolshevik military leaders, met Lenin:

I arrived in Finland and saw Vladimir Ilyich, who bombarded me with questions. I immediately sensed that I was dealing with a comrade who knew our work inside out and was seriously interested in it. Vladimir Ilyich was not content with general answers; he wanted to know the details, the mechanics of our work, our projects, our contacts. He took a keen interest in the military instructors' school we had organized, where we taught our activists how to handle and make explosives, maneuver machine guns and other weapons, learn the trade of the mine-sapper, street-fighting tactics—in a word, prepare the cadres of our combat detachment commanders for the coming revolution.³⁶

³⁵ Tammersfor is the Swedish name given to the city of Tampere, in Finnish.—Ed.

³⁶ Yemelian Yaroslavsky, "Vladimir Ilitch dirige les activités combattives du Parti (Une page d'histoire des organisations militaires et de combat de notre parti)" ("Vladimir Ilyich directs the Party's military activities [A page in the history of our Party's milita-

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In addition to the official Central Committee (controlled by the Mensheviks), there was a Bolshevik center (the Bureau of the Majority Committee) within the leadership of the RSDLP, whose military organization (the Committee for Financial and Military Affairs) was headed by Lenin, Krassin, and Bogdanov.

In preparation for the Stockholm Congress (April 10–20, 1906), Lenin wrote the following draft resolution:

Whereas:

1. scarcely anywhere in Russia since the December uprising has there been a complete cessation of the hostilities, which the revolutionary people are now conducting in the form of sporadic guerrilla attacks upon the enemy;
2. these guerrilla operations, which are inevitable when two hostile armed forces face each other, and when repression by the temporarily triumphant military is rampant, serve to disorganize the enemy's forces and pave the way for future open and mass armed operations;
3. such operations are also necessary to enable our fighting squads to acquire fighting experience and military training, for in many places during the December uprising they proved to be unprepared for their new tasks;

We are of the opinion, and propose that the Congress should agree:

1. that the Party must regard the fighting guerrilla operations of the squads affiliated to or associated with it as being, in principle, permissible, and advisable in the present period;
2. that the character of these fighting guerrilla operations must be adjusted to the task of training leaders of the masses of workers at a time of insurrection, and of acquiring experience in conducting offensive and surprise military operations;
3. that the paramount immediate object of these operations is to destroy the government, police and military machinery, and to

ry and combat organizations]"), in *Lénine tel qu'il fut : Souvenirs de contemporains* ("Lenin as he was: Recollections by his Contemporaries"), vol. 1 (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1958), 465–466. Translated from French by the Editor.

wage a relentless struggle against the active Black-Hundred organizations, which are using violence against the population and intimidating it;

4. that fighting operations are also permissible for the purpose of seizing funds belonging to the enemy, i.e., the autocratic government, to meet the needs of insurrection, particular care being taken that the interests of the people are infringed as little as possible;

5. that fighting guerrilla operations must be conducted under the control of the Party and, furthermore, in such a way as to prevent the forces of the proletariat from being frittered away, and to ensure that the state of the working-class movement and the mood of the broad masses of the given locality are taken into account.³⁷

But the Congress, with its clear majority of Menshevik delegates, did not discuss the question. Lenin returned to the issue in September 1906, asserting that

Guerrilla warfare is an inevitable form of struggle at a time when the mass movement has actually reached the point of an uprising and when fairly large intervals occur between the “big engagements” in the civil war. . . . It is absolutely natural and inevitable that the uprising should assume the higher and more complex form of a prolonged civil war embracing the whole country, i.e., an armed struggle between two sections of the people. Such a war cannot be conceived otherwise than as a series of a few big engagements at comparatively long intervals and a large number of small encounters during these intervals. That being so—and it is undoubtedly so—the Social-Democrats must absolutely make it their duty to create organizations best adapted to lead the masses in these big engagements and, as far as possible, in these small encounters as well.³⁸

Nevertheless, the dissolution of the combat groups was decided by the Menshevik majority at the Third London Congress (May 13–June 1, 1907).

³⁷ V. I. Lenin, “A Tactical Platform for the Unity Congress,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 10.

³⁸ V. I. Lenin, “Guerrilla Warfare,” *Collected Works*, vol. 11.

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4.3. Lenin, the Military Leader

Lenin's role as a war leader is underestimated, and Adam Ulam's judgment on the subject is, unfortunately, widely shared.³⁹ Driven by obvious political interests, sovietologists and Trotskyists have attributed to Trotsky all the military merits of the civil war. No less obvious interests have led Soviet historiography to overemphasize the role of Stalin, Voroshilov, and Frunze. All agree that Lenin played the leading political role, but all neglect his military importance. He himself did nothing to highlight his interest in military affairs; he never visited the general staff nor the trenches and only met Red commanders and soldiers when necessary. As such, there is no military imagery attached to him.

And yet, between December 1 and 24, 1918, he presided over 143 of the 175 meetings of the Defense Council. In 1919 alone, he presided over 14 sessions of the Party Central Committee and 40 sessions of the Political Bureau, which examined military issues. Lenin examined thousands of military questions on these occasions. He sent out at least six hundred letters and telegrams on defense issues.

The Trotskyist version of the story, which sees Lenin giving Trotsky *carte blanche* on military matters, is contradicted by several incidents, the most famous of which is the replacement of the Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army, J. Vācietis, by S. S. Kamenev.⁴⁰

It is true that Lenin delegated most of the war's management to the commanders and commissars he had helped choose, starting with the People's Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs himself. Yet, rarely did Lenin's activities interfere with those of the commanders.

In November 1917, Kerensky met up with the armies that had remained loyal to the Provisional Government, in order to march on

³⁹ "Lenin had very little of the military leader in his make-up. In the years of the Civil War after the Revolution he would not dream, though he had every opportunity to do so, of assuming the office or the pose of the generalissimo. He would not, unlike Trotsky or Stalin, affect the military uniform or intrude his judgment in technical military affairs." [Adam B. Ulam, *Lenin and the Bolsheviks* (London: Collins Clear-Type Press), 343.]

⁴⁰ Both were former czarist colonels. Kamenev himself reported having been rebuffed by Lenin the day he ventured to point out the sheer "beauty" of the planned maneuver. Lenin curtly told him that his job was to beat the enemy, whether he did it artfully or not being of no importance. . .

Petrograd, when said armies had taken Gatchina and were threatening Tsarkoye Selo (today called Pushkin), just 25 km from the capital. During this time Lenin frequently “descended” from the strategic level to the tactical one, provoking an incident with Nikolai Podvoisky, organizer of the Red Guard and the first People’s Commissar for Military and Naval affairs.⁴¹

Several different but concurring accounts describe how Lenin planned to use the fleet as fire support on the Tsarkoye Selo⁴² front.

Lenin called I. I. Vakhrameev, a delegate of the Baltic Fleet, to the command center of the Petrograd military district:

The map of Petrograd and its surroundings was spread out on a large table. The plan to destroy Kerensky’s gang was being discussed. Vladimir Ilyich asked me what, in addition to its detachments, the fleet could provide to help the ground units. Once I knew the disposition of the enemy forces, I explained that the fleet could bomb Kerensky’s troops ambushed in Tsarkoye Selo. The bombardment could be carried out from both sides, with long-range naval guns; to this end, the cruiser Oleg would have to be brought into the Moscow Canal, where it would be possible to bombard the entire Tsarkoye Selo region to the northwest, with its 130 mm guns. In addition, two or three Novik torpedo boats could sail up the Neva, near the village of Rybatskoye, and bombard Tsarkoye Selo from the east with their 100 mm guns. No unit could withstand such a bombardment.

Comrade Lenin took a keen interest in this proposal. He asked me for details, thoroughly checked the feasibility of the proposed operation, and, having convinced himself of its real and rational character, ordered me to undertake its execution im-

⁴¹ Lenin ordered the workers at the Putilov factory to armor trains and take them to the front. However, notes Podvoisky, “It’s true that these orders didn’t concern operations or military units but only the mobilization of ‘everything and everyone’ for defense. But this parallelism of work irritated me terribly.” (Nicolai Podvoiski, “Les journées d’Octobre,” [“The October Days”] in *Lénine tel qu’il fut*, vol. 1, 751. Translated from French by the Editor.)

⁴² Tsarskoye-Selo, now called Pushkin, is a district belonging to the metropolitan area of the federal city of St. Petersburg, formerly known as Petrograd.—Ed.

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mediately, and to keep him regularly informed of the progress of the work.⁴³

But Lenin sought a second opinion (at least one), from another Bolshevik member of the fleet, Fiodor Raskolnikov, who gave an almost identical account: close discussion of the map, study of the depth of the channels, the effect of the tides, firing plans, and so on.

The third account is provided by N. Izmaylov, Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee of the Baltic Fleet, who relates his telegraphic conversation with Lenin, the latter asking him how many ships he could get underway and within what timeframe, whether they were supplied with provisions and equipped with wireless telegraphy, etc.⁴⁴ The maneuver was carried out, the fleet embarked a short distance from Tsarkoye Selo, and observers were placed on the heights of Pulkovo to direct the fire, but the sudden retreat of Kerensky's troops rendered this deployment useless.

It is difficult to judge the military relevance of Lenin's decisions.⁴⁵ Trotsky's testimony on this point is often suspect, as it tends to make light of Lenin's alleged "errors of military judgment" in order to make himself look good.

Lenin's military activity essentially consisted of gathering resources, galvanizing energies, sending the right people to the right places, and giving whoever was entitled a dressing-down. A good example of this is his telegram to Gusev on September 16, 1919:

⁴³ L. Vakhrameev, "Dans les premiers jours d'Octobre" ("During the first days of October"), in *Lénine tel qu'il fut*, vol. 1, 748. Translated from French by the Editor.

⁴⁴ N. Izmaylov, "Le Comité central de la flotte de la Baltique (Centrobalt) aux jours de l'insurrection" ("The Central Committee of the Baltic Fleet [Centrobalt] in the days of insurrection"), in *L'insurrection armée d'Octobre à Pétrograd : Souvenirs des révolutionnaires* ("The October Uprising in Petrograd: Memories of the Revolutionaries") (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958), 397-402. Translated from French by the Editor. Izmaylov's account differs from the previous ones in that the battleship *Respublika* (formerly *Emperor Paul I*), rather than the cruiser *Oleg*, was mentioned—it was only because the latter's draught was too great that the cruiser *Oleg* was finally chosen.

⁴⁵ Soviet publications naturally present them all as insightful, even pivotal, as when Kedrov, who was in command on the Arkhangelsk front, commented on Lenin's direct, personal order to send a heavy artillery battery to Kotlas.

In reality, we have stagnation, almost collapse.

At the Siberian Front they have put some blackguard Olderogge and the old woman Pozern in charge, and “reassured themselves.” An absolute disgrace! And now we are beginning to get beaten! We shall make the RMCR responsible for this, if energetic steps are not taken! To let victory slip out of our hands is a disgrace.

Inaction against Mamontov. Evidently, there has been one delay after another. The troops marching on Voronezh from the North were late. We were late in transferring the 21st Division to the South. We were late with the armored cars. Late with communications. Whether it was the Commander-in-Chief alone who visited Orel, or whether he went with you, is all one: the job was not done. Communications with Selivachov were not established, supervision of him was not established, in spite of the long-standing and direct demand of the Central Committee.

As a result, inaction against Mamontov and inaction with Selivachov (instead of the “victories” promised from day to day in childish little drawings—do you remember how you showed me these little drawings, and how I said: they’ve forgotten the enemy?!⁴⁶). If Selivachov escapes or his division chief betrays, the Republic’s Revolutionary War Council will be to blame, because he was sleeping and reassuring everyone, but didn’t do what was necessary. We need to send the best, most energetic commissars to the South, and not nightcaps.

We’re falling behind on division formation. We’re letting autumn pass us by, but in the meantime Denikin is tripling his forces, receiving tanks, etc., etc., etc. We can’t go on like this. We have to get rid of this somnolent way of working and move on to a lively pace.⁴⁷

In a paragraph also reproduced by Lenin, Clausewitz wrote that

If an increase in vigor is combined with wise limitation in objective, the result is that combination of brilliant strokes and cau-

⁴⁶ Typical Clausewitzian irony.

⁴⁷ V. I. Lenin, “Letter to Sergey Ivanovich Gusev,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 35.

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tious restraint which we admire in the campaigns of Frederick the Great.⁴⁸

It was this balance of qualities that Lenin demonstrated at the time: boldness when launching the October uprising, prudence during the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations. And although Lenin urged commanders and commissars to show initiative, audacity, and combativeness, he never urged them to be reckless—since recklessness and inertia were the twin manifestations of the lack of seriousness he abhorred. Evidence of this attitude can be found in the telegram he sent to Trotsky on June 3, 1920, regarding an offensive plan:

This is sheer Utopia. Won't it cost too many lives? We will be sacrificing a host of our soldiers. We must think this over and weigh it up ten times. I suggest replying to Stalin: "Your proposal for an offensive against the Crimea is so serious that we should make inquiries and give it most careful consideration. Wait for our reply. *Lenin, Trotsky.*"⁴⁹

4.4. Attack and Defense

In paragraphs extensively commented on by Lenin, Clausewitz points out that it is easier to hold a position than to take it, and that the defensive is the strongest form of warfare. If the offensive did not only have a positive objective (the conquest of a province, for example), but was in itself superior to the defensive, no belligerent would adopt the defensive. Those who pursue a positive objective necessarily have to go on the offensive and must, therefore, provide themselves with means superior to those of the enemy, in order to compensate for the inherent superiority of the enemy's defensive position. When one is inferior to the enemy, the choice of the defensive makes up, in part or in whole, for this inferiority.

The defender takes advantage of unforeseen events, weather, and enemy attrition. While the attacker has the advantage of the surprise factor (as in the choice of the moment at which war commences), the defender is able to benefit from said surprise factor at the tactical level. As the defender knows the terrain, he can occupy its strongholds and most advantageous

⁴⁸ Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 283.

⁴⁹ V. I. Lenin, "Letter to L. D. Trotsky," in *Collected Works*, vol. 44.

points, and he can opt for strategy of envelopment, seizing objectives in the enemy's rear, allowing him to play the interior lines,⁵⁰ and so on. Moreover, the defender's position wears out less quickly than that of the attacker, and the defender benefits from the support of the population, as well as the sympathies and moral advantages that result from his status as the victim of aggression.

Certain intrinsic advantages of the defensive position operate even before the defender withdraws into the depths of his territory, and these benefits only increase with the extent of the withdrawal. As this retreat is costly (since it involves abandoning territory), it should only be undertaken if the initial imbalance of forces is such that all the advantages of defense are required to compensate for it. Depending on the extent of the imbalance, the defender may choose to confront the enemy as he crosses the border. If he is not strong enough to do so, he may choose to wait and confront the attacker when he has penetrated his territory to the point of arriving at the position chosen to conduct the battle to his advantage (on a river line, for example). Alternatively, if he still feels too weak, he can wait for the enemy to initiate the attack from this position. If the imbalance is still too great to allow for this option, the defender can extend his waiting position until the enemy offensive reaches its climax. Defense does not mean passivity: the defender, retaining the initiative, can retreat to multiply the number of battles, unleash guerrilla warfare at the enemy's rear, etc.

In 1918, Lenin applied this doctrine step by step. He had been a fierce opponent of the "revolutionary war" against Germany in 1918. But his opposition represented a minority in the party: half the Bolsheviks wanted war, a quarter peace, and a quarter "neither war nor peace" as advocated by Trotsky. Trotsky imposed his line during the peace talks, provoking their breakdown and a new German offensive that proved disastrous for Soviet Russia. On March 3, 1918, Russia was forced to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, by which Germany seized Poland and the Baltic States, and imposed independence on Ukraine, Finland, and the three Transcaucasian republics. The creation of the Red Army on January 15, 1918 had led to

⁵⁰ In a military context, "interior lines" typically refer to the shorter and more direct communication and supply routes that connect various units *within* a force. By controlling these interior lines, a military force can more efficiently move troops and supplies to where they are needed on the battlefield.—Ed.

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initial victories over the White Armies in the Urals, on the Don, Donets, and Kuban and in Crimea, but in May 1918 (at the call of bourgeois nationalists threatened by the development of Ukrainian and Finnish revolutionary movements), the German and Austrian armies decisively breached Ukraine and Finland:

Now that we have become representatives of the ruling class, which has begun to organize socialism, we demand that everybody adopt a serious attitude towards defense of the country. And adopting a *serious* attitude towards defense of the country means thoroughly preparing for it, and strictly calculating the balance of forces. If our forces are obviously small, the best means of defense is *retreat into the interior of the country* (anyone who regards this as an artificial formula, made up to suit the needs of the moment, should read old Clausewitz, one of the greatest authorities on military matters, concerning the lessons of history to be learned in this connection). . . . It has become our duty to calculate with the utmost accuracy the different forces involved, to weigh with the utmost care the chances of our ally (the international proletariat) being able to come to our aid in time. It is in the interest of capital to destroy its enemy (the revolutionary proletariat) bit by bit, before the workers in all countries have united (actually united, i.e., by beginning the revolution). It is in our interest to do all that is possible, to take advantage of the slightest opportunity to postpone the decisive battle until the moment (or *until after* the moment) the revolutionary workers' contingents have united in a single great international army.⁵¹

The German and (to a lesser extent) Austro-Hungarian armies were clearly stronger, better armed, more experienced, and better trained than the young Red Army. The revolutionary war against Germany had been pure adventurism, as its first supporter, Bukharin, would acknowledge ten years later.⁵²

By applying the principle of retreat to the heart of the territory, Lenin opted for the higher form of defensiveness. This defense would allow the

⁵¹ V. I. Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Childishness," in *Collected Works*, vol. 27.

⁵² "The external burdens, the very great difficulties within the country, all of this, we

revolution to develop its forces (the Red Army was in the process of being formed), and the Red Army to exploit the interior lines (units could be sent from north to south, from east to west, according to needs and priorities, and thus obtain in turn the superiority required to win a decisive battle). The German forces were moving away from their supply bases and increasingly exposed to the intense activity of the Ukrainian Red Partisans, while pacifist and revolutionary ideas were spreading within Germany and the German army. Lenin relied heavily on the latter factor. In January 1918, revolutionary political strikes and the creation of workers' soviets had already broken out in Berlin, Vienna, Hamburg, Kiel, Düsseldorf, Leipzig, Essling, and elsewhere, but it was not until November that the revolutionary wave swept across Germany: more than 10,000 workers and soldiers soviets were formed and took control of Berlin. The revolution was crushed, but its effects, combined with those of the armistice, led to the withdrawal of German troops from Ukraine and Crimea.

4.5. *The "Militarization" of Marxism?*

Lenin's "militarization" of Marxism is the subject of two indictments:

1. One that asserts this militarization to be a necessary, intrinsic development of Marxism, as Anibal Romero argues:

For Clausewitz, politics does not necessarily require war; for Lenin, politics is class struggle—the state being merely an instrument of oppression—and the triumph of the proletariat, which can only be achieved by an act of force, through extreme violence leading to the elimination of the state and ultimately to the disappearance of politics itself.⁵³

2. For Jacob Kipp, Lenin's "militarization" of Marxism is a tenden-

felt, had to be dealt with by the sword of revolutionary war." Quoted by Christian Salmon in *Le rêve mathématique de Nicolai Boukharine* ("The Mathematical Dream of Nikolai Bukharin") (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1980), 116. Translated from French by the Editor.

⁵³ Anibal Romero, *Lenín y la militarización del marxismo*, Universidad Simón Bolívar, Caracas 1983. For Romero, this "militarization" stems from the rejection of the "peaceful path" seen as reformist, and thus also concerns Mao Zedong and even, given his use of the category of war, Gramsci. In another document, he also refers to Stalin (Anibal Romero, *Aproximación a la Política*, Universidad Simón Bolívar, Instituto de Altos Estudios de América Latina, Caracas, 1990).

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cy, triggered by the World War, his reading of Clausewitz, and the October Revolution, reaching its climax in 1922–23:

Lenin has come full circle. War and politics have been transposed as subject and object. Here politics have become a continuation of war by other means. The NEP was a tactical device to restore the national economy and regain peasant support in the face of armed uprisings at Kronstadt and in the Tambov region.⁵⁴

Kipp is wrong in general and regarding the timeframe in particular, as Lenin's position clearly "demilitarized" at the end of the Civil War, as evidenced by his report to the Eleventh Congress of the Communist Party (1922):

In the preceding period of development of our revolution, when all our attention and all our efforts were concentrated mainly on, or almost entirely absorbed by, the task of repelling invasion, we could not devote the necessary attention to this link; we had other things to think about. To some extent we could and had to ignore this bond [with the peasant economy] when we were confronted by the absolutely urgent and overshadowing task of warding off the danger of being immediately crushed by the gigantic forces of world imperialism. . . . The idea of building communist society exclusively with the hands of the Communists is childish, absolutely childish. We Communists are but a drop in the ocean, a drop in the ocean of the people. . . . Rendering the exploiters innocuous . . . we have learned to do it. Here a certain amount of pressure must be exercised; but that is easy. To win the second part of the victory, i.e., to build communism with the hands of non-Communists, to acquire the practical ability to do what is economically necessary, we must establish a link with peasant farming; we must satisfy the peasant.⁵⁵

Civil war against the bourgeoisie, for the conquest of state power, is one of the fundamental parts of Leninism, but no more so than the rallying

⁵⁴ Jacob W. Kipp, "Lenin and Clausewitz: The Militarization of Marxism, 1914–1921," in *Military Affairs*, October 1985, 189.

⁵⁵ V. I. Lenin, "Political Report of the Central Committee of the RCP(b)," in *Collected*

of the small and medium-sized peasantry and the intelligentsia to the proletariat. The outreach to these classes and social groups is just as political as the war against the landed gentry and the capitalists. Peace with some and war with others form a general policy, and are an integral part of the Leninist project.⁵⁶

The battle of Kronstadt and the crushing of the Tambov uprising or the Makhnovshchina have a different character than the war against the White and interventionist armies. For Lenin, whose main reference was the Paris Commune, a war against the forces of the ruling classes of the old regime, against the Versailles reactionaries, had to be waged.

This was not the case with Kronstadt, Tambov, or the Makhnovshchina, which were wars “imposed” on the Bolsheviks, in the sense that they were not “part of the program,” so to speak. Of course, the decisions of the commissars were decisive in the emergence of such conflicts, particularly the draft and *prodrazverstka*—the requisitioning of agricultural surpluses to feed the cities—but the Bolsheviks hoped not to have to fight such wars in the future anyway. Leaving aside the agents of counterrevolution adding fuel to the fire, the enemies of the Bolsheviks in Kronstadt, Tambov, and Ukraine consisted of social groups, starting with the middle peasants,⁵⁷ with whom Lenin hoped to form an alliance. The insurgents positioned themselves as enemies of the Soviet government because they perceived it as an antagonistic force. It is true that from the moment they took up arms, they were treated as enemies, but the severity with which they were repressed⁵⁸ was not the result of a general antagonistic policy.

For an insurgent shot by the Cheka, the distinction was of little consolation, but it was crucial to the theoretical question of Lenin’s relationship

Works, vol. 33.

⁵⁶ It could be argued that Lenin’s outreach to the peasantry and intelligentsia was dictated by strategic imperatives (the proletariat needed allies in the civil war), but his interest went far beyond these imperatives. Lenin cultivated the alliance between the peasantry and the intelligentsia as part of the peaceful construction of the new society. When Lenin set out to put the intelligentsia at the service of a cultural revolution and to help all the cultural forces emerging from the masses, he didn’t do so in order to provide the Red Army with better-educated recruits. This is one of the components he considered necessary for socialist construction.

⁵⁷ According to the categories in use: peasants who were sufficiently prosperous to live off their land and livestock but not wealthy enough to employ hired labor.

⁵⁸ Chemical weapons were used on a massive scale against the Tambov insurgents.

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to war. At a time when opposition to autocracy, big landlords, and capitalists was deemed irreconcilable, the Bolshevik government took steps to accommodate the class interests of the middle peasantry; shortly after the suppression of the Tambov revolt, the Council of People's Commissars substituted *prodrazverstka* for *prodnalog*, a set tax levied in the form of grain, which was much more acceptable to the peasants. Hence, even if Lenin did recommend the reading of Clausewitz to party cadres because political and military tactics are closely related fields,⁵⁹ and even if the public discourse remained martial,⁶⁰ in 1922, contrary to Kipp's thesis, Lenin's policies in Russia no longer bore the hallmarks of military confrontation.⁶¹

Reducing Lenin's politics to war, then, is not only disregarding everything that came before the war (the organization and raising of the political consciousness of the working class at national and international levels, the organization and unification of revolutionaries around a strategic project, the bringing together of classes and social groups with an objective interest in revolutionary change, etc.), but also everything that came after the war (the organization of the new revolutionary government, the transformation of social relations, the reorganization of production and the development of town and countryside, cultural revolution, etc.). And if the objectives of pre-revolutionary politics did indeed make it possible to wage and win the revolutionary war, they also had to make it possible to win the peace.

⁵⁹ It was V. Sorin who, in his article "Marxism, tactics, and Lenin," which appeared in *Prauda*, no. 1, 1928, quoted a remark he had heard Lenin make: "Lenin said that 'political and military tactics are called *Grenzgebiet* (a borderland) in German and party workers could study with advantage the works of Clausewitz, the greatest of German military theoreticians.'" (Source of the English translation used here: Donald E. Davis and Walter S.G. Kohn, *Lenin's "Notebook on Clausewitz,"* [Normal: Illinois State University].)

⁶⁰ For example, in the previously quoted "Political Report of the Central Committee of the RCP(b)," Lenin compares the economic system of the NEP to a retreat: "On the whole, the retreat was fairly orderly, although certain panic-stricken voices, among them that of the Workers' Opposition . . . caused losses in our ranks, caused a relaxation of discipline, and disturbed the proper order of retreat. The most dangerous thing during a retreat is panic. When a whole army (I speak in the figurative sense) is in retreat, it cannot have the same morale as when it is advancing." (V. I. Lenin, "Political Report of the Central Committee of the RCP(b)," in *Collected Works*, vol. 33.)

⁶¹ The country would in part regain such a character with the revival of class struggle in the countryside following the 1928 grain crisis, which led to the escalation of the farm strike and forced collectivization.

According to Clausewitz, “we must always consider that with the conclusion of peace, the purpose of the war has been achieved and its business is at an end,”⁶² and this is precisely how Lenin understood it: once the class enemy (Russian reactionaries and imperialist interventionists) had been defeated, the political task was the peaceful construction of socialism. This construction was also a struggle: a struggle for production, for culture, for the improvement of social relations and social consciousness; a struggle against laziness, negligence, selfishness, routine, and bureaucracy, or what Lenin called “oblomovism.” But these struggles did not necessarily amount to war. Peace (which here takes the form of the construction of socialism) is, in accordance with Clausewitz’s conception, the truth of Leninist war.

Only in foreign policy was the situation different. At the Eighth Congress of the Bolshevik Party, speaking of the peace offers that Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson had just made to the Kremlin, Lenin asked the stenographers to put down their pencils so that he could say, without fear of indiscretion, what he thought of them. For Lenin, these offers were dictated by the failure of the military intervention in Russia and the revolutionary vibrancy in Europe, not by the desire to find a *modus vivendi* with the Bolsheviks.⁶³ For Lenin, the contradiction with the bourgeois states was antagonistic; the relentlessness of the interventionists demonstrated their hostility to the first socialist state. While exhaustion, internal contradictions (mutinies, strikes, etc.), and the collapse of the White Armies forced them to abandon their military operations, they did not put an end to their hostility. Peace and international treaties are nothing more than deferred war. It makes no difference whether the tool of revolutionary war is the insurgent indigenous proletariat or the Red Army; Lenin’s international policy was a policy of war, tempered by the conviction that the enemy’s internal contradictions would play the most important role in its defeat. Lenin did not believe it possible to establish normal relations between Soviet

⁶² Clausewitz, *On War*, 91.

⁶³ Cf. Marcel Body, “Les groupes communistes français de Russie 1918-1921” (“The French Communist Groups in Russia 1918-1921”), in *Contributions à l’histoire du Comintern* (“Contributions to the History of the Comintern”), no. 45 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1965), 51.

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Russia and the capitalist states. He was one who, like Wynn Catlin, saw diplomacy as the art of saying “good boy” while preparing for the next attack.

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For prose submissions (articles, essays, fiction) please format your work in a standard Word or Open Office page, double-spaced, with a limit of 8000 words. Poetry submissions should be no longer than 3000 words, spaced and arranged according to how the author wants the poem to appear on A5 dimensions. Visual art (photographs, drawings, etc.) can be submitted in any image format but should be 300 dpi, 148x210 mm minimum. Do *not* submit PDF files and please use Times New Roman, 12 point. Scholarly work that requires citation should use footnotes and *Chicago 17th Edition* rules for formatting.⁶⁴

We are happy to receive responses to any work in previous issues. If accepted, they will be published on the *Material* website: materialjournal.net/submissions. All guidelines detailed above apply.

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All work should be submitted to material.contact@protonmail.com. If you have an idea of something you would like to write for us, you can also contact us at that address.

⁶⁴ You can find the Chicago Manual of Style at chicagomanualofstyle.org.

