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# Deprovincializing Racial Capitalism: John Crawfurd and Settler Colonialism in India

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*Recent literature on racial capitalism has overwhelmingly focused on the Atlantic settler-slave formation, sidelining the history of European imperialism in Asia. This article addresses this blind spot by recovering the aborted project of British settler colonialism in India through the writings of its most prominent advocate, John Crawfurd. It is argued that Crawfurd's vision of a liberal empire in India rejected slavery and indigenous dispossession yet remained deeply racialized in its conception of capital, labor, and value. Crawfurd elaborated a "capital theory of race," which derived racial categories from a civilizational spectrum keyed to the capitalist organization of production. His proposals accordingly revamped the conventional terms of colonization by representing India as overstocked with labor but vacant of capital and skill that only European settlers could provide. The article concludes with the broader implications of a transimperial analytic framework for writing connected histories of racial capitalism and settler colonialism.*

## INTRODUCTION

Few subjects have as quickly gained popularity in the critical quarters of social sciences and humanities as "racial capitalism." It is in fact becoming rarer to see "capitalism" invoked without a chain of adjectives in which "racial" often concatenates with "settler colonial" and "white supremacist." The rediscovery of capitalism in the intersectional mode has no doubt been timely and generative.[1] Exceptions notwithstanding, however, it has also been marked by a certain provincialism that overwhelmingly focuses on racial relations as they have unfolded in the Americas, a tendency shared with the "new history of capitalism" that has effectively turned out to be a new history of *American* capitalism (Rockman 2014). The theoretical edge of both fields has been to frame the history of capitalism in decidedly colonial terms, exposing the roots of republican and market liberties in the subsoil of invasion, dispossession, and enslavement. The substitution of imperial for national methodological lenses, however, has remained limited to the Western hemisphere, creating the impression that the intersection of colonialism, capitalism, and race is primarily an Atlantic phenomenon. The editors of the recent volume, *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, admit the literature's "overwhelming focus on the Atlantic" and "the important empirical and methodological questions it raises," above all, "how well does the concept of racial capitalism travel to various global contexts?" (Jenkins and Leroy 2021, 16). The question points to an important blind spot of the racial capitalism scholarship—namely, the enormous and no less racialized record of European territorial expansion and commercial imperialism in Asia.[2] Meanwhile, postcolonial studies that could address this lacuna with their historiographical command of imperialism in Asia had abandoned analyses of capitalism for the representational politics of universalism and difference (Lazarus 2011).

In a bid to address this blind spot, this paper demonstrates the insights to be gained into the coconstitution of race and capital by incorporating the transimperial spaces of Asia into the frame of analysis. To cut this task down to the size of an essay, it focuses on the arguments for British settler colonialism in India and Southeast Asia in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. If "settler colonialism in Asia" sounds like an oxymoron, it is because it remained by and large a failed project, leaving the historical experience of North America, Australia, and New Zealand to shape the definition of "settler colonialism."[3] Recovering and situating this project in Britain's imperial political economy shows that settler colonialism's racializing logic encompassed not only appropriating land for prospective settlers but also commanding local labor and land by exporting metropolitan capital. Although the articulation of land and labor in the Asian context was driven

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[1] The literature is already sizable and cannot be overviewed in detail here. The spark behind the hermeneutic of "racial capitalism" comes from Robinson (1983). For representative elaborations, see the essays collected in Johnson and Lubin (2017), Johnson and Kelley (2017), and Jenkins and Leroy (2021). For a critical overview and response, see Ralph and Singhal (2019).

[2] Important recent exceptions include Virdee (2014), Florio (2016), Manjapra (2018), Tilley (2020), Liu (2020), and Khan (2021). This is not to overlook the contributions of earlier scholarship documenting the intersection of race, commerce, and empire in Asia and exploring the themes now corralled under "racial capitalism" without invoking the term. Exemplary are Alatas (1977), Stoler (1985), Kale (1998), Mohabir (2010), Sharma (2011).

[3] The current definition denotes an invasive structure that combines the "elimination of the native" with the establishment of a "settler contract" on evacuated land. See Wolfe (2006), Pateman (2007), and Veracini (2010).

by no less capitalist imperatives of profit (and profits were indeed immense), the capitalist articulation as well as the racialization of social difference that interlaced it followed paths that do not fit the Atlantic script.

The cause for the British settlement of India united a network of interests, ranging from the merchant community in Calcutta to free traders in London to manufacturers in Manchester. It also united abolitionists, free traders, imperial reformers, and philanthropists into a broad if loose liberal front. At the center of these networks, and thus at the center of this paper, stood John Crawfurd. As a former colonial administrator, political economist, and radical reformer, Crawfurd was one of the most unrelenting, vociferous, and renowned advocates of settler colonialism and free trade in India. He agitated for legal equality and political inclusion in India, which would all but upend the British East India Company's despotic regime and its "rule of colonial difference" (Chatterjee 2012). Beneath its formal liberalism, however, his vision of a reformed empire remained deeply anchored in racializing conceptions of labor, value, and capital. Crawfurd's proposals revamped the conventional terms of settler colonialism, above all the trope of vacant land, by representing the Indian subcontinent as overstocked with labor but vacant of capital and skill. Correspondingly, prospective European settlers, while still cast as the exogenous force of "improvement" in a deeply Lockean mold, embodied not the labor needed to improve empty lands but the capital and technology needed to save Indian agriculture from its primitive autarky and unlock its commercial potential. Crawfurd's writings on imperial reform therefore open a window onto the inner variegation of "colonization" in the nineteenth century and the racialized configuration of colonial capitalism in South and Southeast Asia.

I contend that Crawfurd's racial construction of capital and labor had its precursors in the Scottish Enlightenment theory of civilization and savagery and its deep investment in commercial progress. Far from being a racist legacy of feudal Europe[4] or a blanket cultural prejudice against the "colonial Other," the civilizational categories he employed had distinctly modern, political economic content keyed to the capitalist organization of land and labor, which notably cut across the colonizer–colonized divide. Two observations lend support to this last argument. First, a major inspiration and in fact a model for Crawfurd's scheme were Chinese entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia, who employed Chinese indentured as well as local labor in mining and commercial agriculture. Second, Crawfurd pegged his assessment of civilizational progress in the region to the average labor productivity as manifested by the different rate of wages paid to laborers from various enthoreligious groups. His high regard for Chinese emigrants, when juxtaposed to his contempt for Indian peasants and his condescension for Malayan and Javanese cultivators, attests to the class and capital bias that molded his hierarchical view of social difference. Crawfurd's was a *capital theory of race* rather than a racial theory of capital. The racial categories it harbored did not signify exclusion from the universal precepts of political economy but subordinate inclusion in them, reflecting the inherent unevenness and heterogeneity of capitalist expansion. Accordingly, his political economy was not so much racialized as racializing.

The analysis contributes to the debates on racial capitalism and settler colonialism by clarifying two questions for future research. First, expanding the scope of racial capitalism to the Asian colonial context raises theoretical issues. Crawfurd's vision of a liberal and multicultural polity in which capital and labor nonetheless remain deeply racialized urges a rethinking of racial capitalism beyond the Atlantic frame of slavery and eliminativism. Relatedly, juxtaposing the Atlantic and the Asian contexts broaches methodological questions about writing comparative or connected histories of racial capitalism and developing concepts to endow such histories with analytical rigor. Second, Crawfurd's conceptual extension of "colonization" to exporting capital and technology, while remaining rooted in ideas of agricultural improvement, economic progress, and settlement, hints at the need for a more internally variegated category of "settler colonialism" than permitted by the narrowly territorial construction of the concept. I submit that foregrounding the political economy of settler colonialism can be conducive to such theoretical pluralization.

The paper proceeds in six parts. I begin by framing Crawfurd's writings as a theoretically sophisticated exemplar of the imperial reform agenda that crested in the 1820s and 1830s. The second section elaborates the analytic of "capitalist racialization" for decoding Crawfurd's political economy. Sections three and four examine his dual criticism of India's economic backwardness and of British despotism perpetuating it. The fifth section turns to his advocacy of British colonization of India as a liberal capitalist panacea modeled on Singapore, stressing its convergences with Edward Gibbon Wakefield's theory of systematic colonization. The final section illustrates capitalist racialization in Crawfurd's proposals, this time by contrasting them with Wakefield's plans for the colonization of Australia. I conclude with the broader implications of the analysis for thinking about racial capitalism and settler colonialism.

## SITUATING JOHN CRAWFURD: POLITICAL ECONOMY OF IMPERIAL REFORM

To contemporary scholars accustomed to carving European empires along the settler colony/dependency axis, "settler colonialism in Asia" would appear a contradiction in terms. Yet for its late Georgian and early Victorian exponents, it represented a concrete prospect and a splendid remedy to pressing social problems in Britain. The cause for free trade and colonization in India emerged out of the sense of crisis

[4] This is a simplified but not inaccurate encapsulation of the thesis advanced by Robinson (1983) and adopted by many commentators without much controversy.

that swept the country from the 1820s to the 1840s. The end of the Napoleonic Wars brought about severe economic distress and social unrest. The political and economic elite worried about the glut of capital and shrinking profit margins, lamented the plight of the middle and professional classes, and dreaded escalating labor militancy in the cities and in the countryside (Hilton 2006; Hobsbawm and Rudé 1975). At the same time, by curbing the revolutionary threat and securing Britain's ascendancy in Europe, the peace of 1815 also weakened the case for authoritarian conservatism at home and proconsular imperialism overseas (Bayly 1989). Liberal political movements that had gone into hibernation after 1793 returned, this time with the newly forged weapons of political economy and utilitarianism in their ideational arsenal (Semmel 1970b).

At the intersection of these two currents emerged a distinctly liberal breed of imperial reformism, which sought the solution to Britain's social troubles in a new empire of free trade, free labor, and accountable government. The Colonial Reform Movement promoted an active settler colonization program for exporting surplus British labor and capital to refashion Canada, Australia, and New Zealand into agrarian capitalist satellite economies (Semmel 1970a). The India reform movement, while animated by kindred concerns, instead eyed the subcontinent as a destination for surplus British capital and waxed hopeful about unlocking its commercial potential to Britain's benefit. India reform also boasted a wider constituency, counting among its adherents abolitionists, evangelists, free traders, and provincial manufacturing and commercial interests from Glasgow to Singapore (Laidlaw 2012; Leonard 2021; Major 2012; Mehrotra 1967).[5] Uniting such diverse agendas was the prospect of developing India[6] into a major producer of agricultural commodities historically grown by enslaved labor, above all cotton, sugar, and coffee. Export-oriented agriculture would kill three birds with one stone by lifting Indian cultivators out of poverty, lowering input prices for British manufacturers and consumers, and undermining the economic basis of American slavery by driving slave-grown produce out of the world market. For the stalwarts of Indian reform, the slogan of the *British Indian Advocate* (organ of the British India Society), "Justice to India—Prosperity to England—Freedom to the Slave," distilled its moral and economic stakes (Florio 2016; Laidlaw 2012).

To the reformers, the unimpeded settlement of India by private British subjects with capital and connections presented the most effective manner of achieving these objectives. The idea of settlement itself was not new. Evangelists like Charles Grant and William Wilberforce had been clamoring since the 1790s for the free emigration of the British to India as a force of moral and religious uplift. What was novel in the 1820s and 1830s was the salience of economic arguments. John Bowring (1829, 20), political economist and the future governor of Hong Kong, rebuked the East India Company for denying "to the East the benefits of Western civilization, and to the West the re-action of oriental prosperity, by opposing the colonization of British India." Senior colonial administrators William Bentinck and Charles Metcalfe broke with the Company's suspicion of private British settlement. Metcalfe "lamented that out countrymen in India are excluded from the possession of land … [T]hose restrictions impede the prosperity of our Indian empire, and of course their removal would promote it," whereas Bentinck went so far as fantasizing about a future Creole polity in India (quoted in Chatterjee 2012, 146). Meanwhile, James Silk Buckingham (1833, 35), the former editor of *Oriental Herald*, pleaded with his fellow members of parliament that "there was nothing which was calculated so rapidly and so powerfully to develop the rich resources of India, and make her people wealthy, civilized, and happy, as this colonization of its vast interior with British settlers of capital, science, skill, and industry, combined."

Nor were these calls restricted to circles in Britain. A pamphlet issued by Calcutta merchants agitated for "the right of free resort and free settlement in regions which now form a component portion of the British empire, and which unfettered skill, industry, and capital would speedily convert into an inexhaustible source of production, and a market of boundless extent" (Anonymous 1828, 90) Liberal papers in Bengal—*Calcutta Journal*, *India Gazette*, and *Bengal Hurkaru*—presaged India's economic revitalization through British colonization. In his report to the Parliamentary Select Committee in 1832, the illustrious Indian liberal Rammohan Roy (1925, 252–3, 260), anticipated that "European settlers in India will introduce the knowledge they possess of superior modes of cultivating the soil and improving its products"; he could thus "safely recommend that educated persons of character and capital should now be permitted and encouraged to settle in India." Another Indian liberal Dwarkanath Tagore astonishingly condemned Act XI (1836), which abolished British residents' legal privileges in India, as a blow to British liberty. Political economists across the Channel struck a resonant note. In *Oriental Herald*, J. C. L. De Sismondi (1825, 234) stressed the "great importance of the colonization of India as well to England as to the country itself" on account of England's "superfluity of capital" and "numerous body of active and intelligent men without any fixed course of life." In a more triumphant tone, Jean-Baptiste Say (1824, 359) anticipated the "conquest" of the Orient by the "ascendancy of [European] knowledge and institutions," prefiguring Friedrich List's ([1841] 1909, 282) verdict that regenerating "the mouldering civilisation of Asia" was "only possible by means of an infusion of European vital power," above all "by European

[5] For example, George Thompson, a key member of the British India Society, rose to fame as an abolitionist orator and lectured for the Anti-Corn Law League before becoming the London agent of Bengal Landholders' Association; when his inaugural lectures at the BIS were published in 1840, the preface was written by the renowned American abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.

[6] It should be noted the "India" in Crawfurd's writings encompassed the "Indian Archipelago" referring to the insular Southeast Asia, roughly comprising contemporary Malaysia and Indonesia.

immigration and the introduction of European systems of government."

The arguments for British and more broadly European settler colonialism in India thus grew out of what Partha Chatterjee (2012, 153) has described as an "antiabsolutist formation," a "liberal and capitalist" constellation of ideas, interests, and movements that led a brief but luminous career before yielding to the enlightened despotism of the late 1840s. Crawfurd was an organic intellectual of this historical formation. Straddling the "middle" political thought of publicists and legislators and the scholarly heights of political economy and ethnography, he furnished some of the most sophisticated arguments for the Indian cause. A Scottish physician with University of Edinburgh pedigree, Crawfurd spent 20 years in the employ of the Company, most notably as a colonial administrator and diplomat in Java, Singapore, Burma, Siam (Thailand), and Cochin China (Vietnam). Upon his retirement, he removed to London as the agent of the Calcutta merchant community and then of Bengal Landholders Association. His credentials as radical and political economist, long-standing critic of the "old colonial system," and authority on the commercial resources of the region aligned him with the commercial and manufacturing interests invested in ending trade monopolies and reforming the Indian administration (Knapman 2017; Taylor 2010). As a publicist and expert witness before parliamentary select committees, he was particularly active in the 1829–1833 campaign to abolish the Company's remaining monopolies, wherein he found a platform for publicizing the cause for the British settlement of India.[7] After the 1833 Charter Act terminated the Company's commercial functions, he narrowed his focus on legal and administrative reform, targeting Company's despotic powers and internal monopolies that he held responsible for the commercial underdevelopment of India and its squandered value to Britain.

Crawfurd's arguments on the India question displayed notable continuity and consistency across his writings. From the tomely *History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820) and *The Journal of An Embassy to Siam and Cochin China* (1830b) to his pamphlets on the colonization of India (1829; 1833; 1837), Indian taxation (1838; 1839), monopoly of the Canton trade (1830c), sugar and slavery (1833), and systematic colonization of Australia (1834), Crawfurd built his case for a liberal empire on the pillars of Scottish natural history, Ricardian political economy, and utilitarian jurisprudence.[8] His searing rebuke of European mercantilism and colonial violence rivaled that of Adam Smith and Dennis Diderot, his free trade commitments went so far as dismissing the opposition to British opium trade as unduly moralizing, and he railed against the exclusion of Indians from positions of trust in their own country.[9] Yet, Crawfurd also diverged from the Scottish philosophical formation he acquired at Edinburgh. His liberalism evinced less the cosmopolitan skepticism of Smith's generation than the more strident attitudes of Victorian Whiggism towards non-Europeans (O'Brien 2010, 20–2).[10] Above all, Crawfurd's racializing political economy emerged through the door opened by the Scottish stadial theory of civilization and savagery that had drawn much of its semantic content from categories of classical political economy. In his writings, the defining features of "commercial society"—commercial sociality, division of labor, productivity, and capital accumulation—sedimented into "global standards of market civilization" (Bowden 2007) and grounded his advocacy for British colonization in Asia. As purportedly universal standards that were nonetheless uniquely realized only by Europe, these also formed the ideological meeting and bleeding grounds of environmental and racial explanations, occupying what John Hobson (2012, 3) has described as an "interstitial position" between "Eurocentric institutionalism" and "scientific racism."

## FROM CIVILIZATION AND SAVAGERY TO CAPITALIST RACIALIZATION

Crawfurd's writings on race have been controversial, not least because he figured among the handful of early polygenists who challenged the Mosaic narrative of the common origins of humanity. He advanced a theory of autochthonous creation of multiple races without abandoning the postulate of a universal human nature pivotal to Enlightenment natural history. The unstable unity of these commitments, reflected as much in political, economic, and legal argumentation as in

[7] The 1813 Charter act had already opened India trade to "country traders" from Britain.

[8] The list of the primary texts and abbreviations referenced in the remainder of the paper are as follows. *History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820) [HIA]; *A View of the Present State and Future Prospects of the Free Trade and Colonization of India* (1829) [FTCI]; *An Inquiry Into Some of the Principal Monopolies of the East India Company* (1830a) [PMEIC]; *Journal of An Embassy from the Governor General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (1830b) [JES]; *Third report from the Select committee of the House of Commons, appointed to enquire into the present state of the affairs of the East-India Company* (1832) [HCSC]; *The Chinese Monopoly Examined* (1830c) [CME]; *Notes on the Settlement or Colonization of British Subjects in India* (1833); "Sugar Without Slavery" (with Perronet Thompson) (1833) [SWS]; "New South Australian Colony" (1834) [NSAC]; *Sketch of the Commercial Resources, and the Monetary and Mercantile System of British India* (1837) [SCR]; *Notes on the Indian Act, No. 11, of 1836* (1838) [NIA]; *An Appeal from the Inhabitants of British India to the Justice of the People of England* (1839) [AIBI].

[9] Crawfurd's liberal fidelities were not at odds with his service under the Company. Many parliamentary radicals in this period were returned Company officials, such as the formidable Joseph Hume (Quilty and Knapman 2018).

[10] For the "natural history" of civilization and savagery, originally elaborated by Adam Smith and instructed by Dugald Stewart during Crawfurd's time at Edinburgh, see Pocock (2006, 270–87) and Berry (1997). One should not overdraw the generational divide. Stadial theory and the civilizational hierarchies it subtended were already enlisted to justifying British imperial rule in the eighteenth century. See Kohn and O'Neill (2006) and O'Neill (2016).

historical and ethnographic analysis, have supplied ample material for scholarly disagreement. Hagiographies of Crawfurd have credited his polygenism with an egalitarian-inclusive appreciation of human plurality, to which they attribute his "liberal" and "democratic" credentials as an imperial reformer (Knapman 2016; Knapman 2017, 74–92; Wong 2018). Skeptics, by contrast, have underscored his explicit somatization of social difference into racial "types" and his brash proclamations of European superiority as evidence of (at best) "soft racism" (Ellingson 2001, 309–20; Krishnan 2007; Quilty 1998; 2018). Predictably, both sides have found plenty of grist for their mill in Crawfurd's theory of "racial admixture" that amalgamated social-historical and biological-phenotypical elements.

Without getting entangled in the dispute, and much less claiming to solve it, the following sections delineate the role of political economy in Crawfurd's formulation of racial categories. To this end, the analysis follows two primary premises developed by recent studies on race and racism in the field of critical international studies. The first premise is to conceive of racism as a "colonial ordering principle" with transnational roots, as opposed to a domestic problem that falls within the purview of American studies or comparative politics (Thompson 2015). The second is to shift the analytic center of gravity from "race" to "racialization" as a modality of power whereby "colonialism refashions its human terrain," "an assortment of local attempts to impose classificatory grids on a variety of colonised populations, to particular though coordinated ends." (Wolfe 2016, 10; also see Wolfe 2001; Vucetic 2015; cf. Fields and Fields 2014). The analytic of racialization grasps race as the effect rather than the starting point of institutional-ideological complexes of exclusion, domination, and expropriation that have structured what W. E. B. Dubois called the "global color line" (Nisancioglu 2020). To adapt this analytic to the question at hand, I propose the notion of "capitalist racialization" as a particular mode of elaborating social difference into racial categories. The term specifically refers to the production and reification of social distinctions within the circuits of accumulation by "classifying, ordering, creating and destroying people, labour power, land, environment, and capital" (Tilley and Shilliam 2018, 4). A core feature of capitalist racialization is the production of devalued and disposable lives, work, and ecologies so as to deliver them to the circuits of capital at little or no cost, with a *modus operandi* spanning brutal regimes of violence such as nineteenth-century slavery and quotidian systems of compulsion such as twenty-first century immigration (Bhambra 2021; Fraser 2016; Issar 2021; Moore 2018).

As a general notion, capitalist racialization gains empirical traction through conceptual mediations attentive to the sociohistorical specificities of context (White 2020). I argue that the elements of capitalist racialization in Crawfurd's proposal to colonize India were rooted in nineteenth-century discourses of political economy and ethnography. Crawfurd indexed his racial hierarchies on the perceived degree of subordination of land, labor, and social reproduction to the command of capital. The social forms he associated with the domination of capital set the parameters of a civilizational spectrum in which historical stages of development shaded into embodied properties of various groups. What emerged from an ostensibly universal disquisition on the division of labor, agriculture and manufacture, commerce and taxation, and rents and profits were racialized categories of the British, the Chinese, and the Hindoo.

Here, "the great ethnographic paradigms" of "the savage" and "the Oriental" supplied Crawfurd with the historical language that particularized the abstract tenets of political economy into a racial hierarchy (Ellingson 2001, xiii; cf. Whelan 2009). Since the mid-eighteenth century, the proponents of modern "commercial society" had defended it as the highest stage of sociohistorical development whose laws classical political economy made its prime object of inquiry (Berry 2013). Key to this defense was the purported status of commercial society as the only social order that reconciled authority, liberty, and prosperity. A system of "civil liberties" whereby one could voluntarily submit to authority yet remain free could only emerge with the commercialization of social relations (Pocock 1985, 121). By this metric, "the savage" embodied untamed liberty that vitiated the orderliness necessary for material advancement, whereas "the Oriental" emblematized customary submission to despotic authority that enabled a modicum of opulence but strangled liberty and progress. The savage was free but uncivilized, whereas the Oriental was civilized but unfree. Societal development had not yet begun for the former; for the latter, it had already stalled.

Once these categories and their normative freight were in place, it was not a huge leap to shift the locus of civilizational deficit from climate and environment to biological and hereditary properties—that is, to racialize social difference. For instance, the "wild Indian," whom John Locke assigned the same universal capacity for reason as the English, would morph in nineteenth century public discourse into the "vanishing race" whose alleged racial traits foreclosed adaptation. Similarly, the figure of "the Asiatic" would obtain a comparable racial rigidity over the same period, entailing the redefinition of the imperial mission from civilizing India to protecting its "traditional communities" from the destabilizing pressures of modernity (Mantena 2010).

Crawfurd's position on India reform lucidly encapsulates the logic of racialization. As discussed below, Crawfurd fashioned racial difference out of a general model of human development rather than qualifying the general model in the face of racial difference. The same argument also holds for his remarks about Britain's imperial duty to improve the condition of its benighted Asian subjects. Taken together with his polygenist theory of sociohistorical difference, this disposition has led some to conclude that Crawfurd's "racial view of European superiority was the basis of his justification for political-economic arguments in the East India question" (Kumagai 2010, 183). Such

construal puts the cart before the horse by treating race as a precursor rather than effect of racialization and ascribing causal primacy to cultural arrogance. The approach adopted here grasps European colonial empires as competitive projects of "*mise en valeur*" (Adelman 2015, 93–5), which coiled together the new sciences of political economy and geography for maximizing nature's commercial possibilities and integrating imperial peripheries in the service of the metropole (Bowen 1998). While Crawfurd did consider British intervention as India's only way out of social and economic backwardness, his racialization of Indian backwardness and solutions to it ought to be viewed through lens of "imperial political economy."

## INDIAN BACKWARDNESS AND BRITISH DESPOTISM

Fifty years before Crawfurd, Edmund Burke (1981, 389–90) addressed the House of Commons in defense of Fox's India Bill, cautioning his audience that India "does not consist of an abject and barbarous populace … but a people for ages civilized and cultivated; cultivated by all the arts of polished life, whilst we were yet in the woods." For Burke, India at the time the British landed on its shores was already a commercial society of great social complexity, a view shared by the likes of historian William Robertson and Orientalist William Jones (O'Neill 2016). Although an established Orientalist himself, Crawfurd disdained Indian society as a despotic, superstitious, and poverty-stricken morass desperate for the improving hand of the British Empire. On this score, he was ironically much closer to James Mill, whose three-volume *History of British India* was an extended outpouring of contempt for a country that he had never visited,[11] and with whom Crawfurd disagreed on almost every other point concerning the political economy and the government of India.[12]

Crawfurd's 1829 pamphlet, *Free Trade and Colonization of India*, proclaimed, "A thorough freedom of commercial intercourse between the European and Indian dominions of the Crown, and an unrestricted settlement of Englishmen in India, are the grand and essential instruments for improving our Eastern Colonies and rendering them useful to the mother country" (FTCI, 1). This statement encapsulated the thematic threads that connected *History of the Indian Archipelago* to Crawfurd's subsequent pamphlets. The central strand was a Smithian theory of socioeconomic development predicated on division of labor, commercialization, technological advancement, labor productivity, and capital accumulation. In *History*, Crawfurd described the "early ages of society in every country" as a "rude condition of manufacturing industry, of the waste of labour and of time, which results in an uncivilized society, from the imperfection of machinery, from indolence, unskillfulness, and the absence of subdivision of labour" (HIA I, 179). By these standards, India fared rather poorly: the "productions of the Indian industry left to the exclusive management of the natives … are inferior to the similar productions of every other tropical country" because "the Hindoos are inferior to Europeans and to Chinese in real skill and intelligence" (FTCI 16–7).

The same theme resurfaced in an 1837 pamphlet addressed to prospective settlers in India, which depicted a society that had not yet advanced to the commercial stage. Without proper division of labor between agriculture and manufacturing, the Indian products (excepting cotton fabrics) were crude, "unmarketable," and suitable only for a domestic subsistence economy that afforded little room for conveniences and luxuries (SCR, 12–8, 27). Both pamphlets detailed the cash crops indigenous to or cultivable in the region—above all, cotton, sugar, tobacco, and coffee—contrasting India's paltry output with the production of the US, Brazil, and Egypt (FTCI 18–38; SCR 34–42). The American example, together with successful Chinese success in cultivating sugar and tobacco in Southeast Asia and the thriving European indigo industry in India, suggested that the issue was not soil or climate but "a mere affair of civilization" manifested in the "slovenliness and ignorance of a semi-barbarous people" (FTCI, 17). Crawfurd's charges of indolence partook of what Syed Hussein Alatas (1977, 83) has famously labeled the "myth of the lazy native," an ideology of the "plantation-based colonial capitalism" that shaped the "classification of labour into useful and meaningless" in colonial Asia. Crawfurd was not exceptional in measuring Indian agricultural performance by the metric of the Atlantic plantations. As has been documented, the 1830s witnessed growing efforts by planters, merchants, and British colonial administrators to adapt the "American model" to monocropping around the Indian Ocean (Florio 2016; Manjapra 2018). What gave Crawfurd's plan its particular bent was his knowledge of Chinese-owned plantations in the region, which offered a concrete notion of what the capitalist colonization of Asia could look like.

While Crawfurd described Indian economic backwardness a civilizational problem, his account of civilizational deficit was not a priori essentialist. Like Smith, who had applied the uniform principles of political economy to Scotland and Bengal alike, Crawfurd explained different levels of social development by a combination of universal principles of human nature and variation in environmental and institutional conditions (Jonsson 2010; Travers 2009). He wrote, "The same general principles which are applicable to Ireland, are equally applicable to India… . Human nature is

[11] Crawfurd's Orientalism was not ecumenical. His broadly appreciative view of Southeast Asian peoples contrasted sharply with his scorn for "the Hindoos," even though he had spent considerable time in both regions. When his fellow Scottish Orientalists ridiculed Mill for writing *History* without having set foot in the country, Crawfurd dismissed such skepticism as "pernicious prejudice" and held that the book was "the better being so" (HIA III, 53). See Rendall (1982).

[12] These disagreements concerned the Indian land revenue system, importance of the Indian market to British capital accumulation, and representative government in India. See Stokes (1959, 68–80, 131–2).

pretty much the same in all ages and climates. What is fundamentally true of it under a fair complexion, is equal so under a brown or a black one. It cannot be transmuted to serve the interested purposes of patronage or party. When we legislate for the Hindoos, in short, we legislate for men, and not for creatures of a clouded and egotistical imagination" (FTCI 55). The real causes of India's plight had to be sought not in racial properties but in institutional conditions.[13] Crawfurd, like many of his contemporaries, pointed his finger at "Asiatic despotism." His claim that Asiatic despotism had grown out of the climate and geography of the region was not original,[14] nor was his verdict that it had caused social stagnation and foreclosed autochthonous change.[15] More immediate for his argument, and more relevant for our analysis, was the perverse role of British rule in deepening Asiatic despotism, for it was the same British agency that held the key to the economic regeneration of India.

Smith and Diderot's frontal attack on militarized joint-stock companies is well known (Muthu 2008; Pitts 2005). Crawfurd's assessment of the British rule in India not only raised their critique to a new pitch but also further sharpened the neo-Burkean critique of merchant sovereignty with the tools of political economy. He held a bleak view of the overall record of European colonialism in Asia, excoriating it for its deluded mercantilist principles and its regressive socioeconomic effects in the region.[16] The British rule in India was no exception to this history. If anything, the East India Company's territorial annexations, grip over land revenue, and internal monopolies on salt and opium exacerbated the baneful effects of militarized trading. To Crawfurd, the onus for India's present commercial stagnation lay with the Company's merchant sovereignty that had assumed the powers of an Oriental despot.[17] His pamphlets joined and amplified the voices that accused the Company of squeezing the colonial economy dry with utter disregard for the productivity or the welfare of the Indian society.

To begin with, Crawfurd argued that the Company's trade—its ostensible raison d'être—was "tribute" in disguise. Under the "revenue investment system," the Company used land revenue to finance its Indian exports, dividends on stock, and interest on commercial bonds (BCI, 42; SCR, 72–4, 103). The remittance of tribute by exporting Indian commodities below production costs destroyed competition, as did the Company's taxation of private British merchants in the carrying trade (FTCI, 23). In Crawfurd's view, the Company's record as a landlord proved as dismal as its ledger as a merchant. He maintained that the revenue collection, especially under the variable assessment of the *ryotwari* system, appropriated all rent and profit, effectively destroying private property in land and reducing cultivators to sharecroppers (AIBI, 11–16; FTCI, 30, 39–40).[18] He also lambasted the "advances system" (by which Company agents recruited local labor) for preying on the poverty of peasants and rendering them perpetually indebted to local moneylenders (PMEIC, 10–5; SCR, 45–9). Such hyperextractive policies, he observed, had stripped the Indian economy of the funds and the incentive to invest in agricultural production, even as British manufacturers demanded more and higher quality Indian cotton. The squeezing of the peasantry also deprived it of purchasing power, forestalling what he anticipated would be "an extensive market for the consumption of European productions" (FTCI, 15).[19] He concluded that India's welfare, very much like Ireland's before it, was sacrificed to the mercantilist doctrine that premised metropolitan advantage on the subjugation of the colony (FTCI, 102). For the misery of the Indians, Crawfurd averred, the "blame rests with the rulers of India and with those who legislate for India" (FTCI, 15).

Equally egregious to Crawfurd was the Company's efforts to suppress private British settlement, enterprise, and investment in India, especially since British colonization appeared to him to be the only viable agent of economic regeneration. In his estimation, all of India's existing cotton, indigo, and opium exports, and the entirety of the Canton trade that financed Britain's tea imports, were attributable to the enterprise of those whom the Indian administration sneeringly called "interlopers" (BCI, 7–9). He commended their achievements despite their thin numbers and the slew of legal fetters that hobbled their ventures. He railed against the licenses that British-born subjects had to obtain from the Company to settle in India, a prerogative that Company guarded until 1833. Moreover, British residents in India could only reside in the presidency towns of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay under express travel restrictions. Because they were barred from owning lands in the interior, they had to

[13] For similar remarks on the Indians and the Chinese, see CME 34; PMEIC 35, 37, 40; SCR, 34. These passages echoed Burke's opposition to "geographic morality" in India. Three decades later, Crawfurd (1867) would change his position and attribute the stagnation of India to the "innate" properties of the "Asiatic races," drawing a sharp if measured rejoinder from Dadabhai Naoroji (1867).

[14] Crawfurd traced the purported servility of the "people of the East" to the absence of a "shepherd stage" in the region, which had deprived the subcontinent's inhabitants of the martial and civic virtue needed reconcile civilization and liberty (HIA II, 296-304). For a discussion, see Müller (2018).

[15] For instance, Crawfurd scoffed at the "primitive" methods of sugar and cotton production in India, reckoning that these methods were employed "three hundred years ago, and in all likelihood, three thousand" (FTCI 24, 30).

[16] See the second volume of *History*, especially 292–349, 394, 447, 472.

[17] Crawfurd scorned merchant sovereignty as a "barbarous principle" and armed trading a "commercial monster," ridiculed in China, Arabia, and India but deemed essential by the advocates of the Company (CME 40; FTCI, 41).

[18] Crawfurd frequently decried the *ryotwari* system and lauded Cornwallis reforms that instituted the *zemindari* system in Bengal (BCI 47–48). His position on land revenue varied across colonial contexts and over time. For a discussion, see Knapman (2017, 61–70) and Quilty (2001, 326–31).

[19] This argument resonated with the economic case for abolition at the time, which targeted the slave societies in the New World for impeding increased productivity and market formation. For a discussion, see Drescher (2002).

channel agricultural investments through local landowners. Crawfurd held this restriction responsible for frequent conflicts of interest, which, he argued, the Company's pluralist court system was unfit to handle (BCI, 50).[20] The weak private property rights in land also undercut the principal security for large loans needed for agricultural improvement (FTCI, 54–5). Crawfurd reserved his strongest objection for the Company's power of summary banishment of any British subject from India without due process, which he accused of undermining the sense of security and predictability necessary for extensive and long-term investments (BCI, 16, 50; HCSC, 163).

## COMMERCIAL CAPITALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

While immediately targeting the Company, Crawfurd's remonstrances conveyed a general frustration with British capital's tenuous hold on the agriculture of the subcontinent. Specifically, his exasperation indexed the failure of plantation-based agrarian capitalism to take hold in India. Two analytic frames developed by contemporary historians, "gentlemanly capitalism" (Cain and Hopkins 1993) and "commercial capitalism" (Banaji 2020), are helpful for elucidating this point.

Studies of the British India's articulation to the world economy have noted that the failure to establish a strong regime of private property in land shaped the distinctly commercial character of British capitalist activity in the region. Lacking direct control over agricultural production, British capitalists in India conglomerated in "agency houses" in the presidency towns and concentrated their activities in the "gentlemanly" sectors of finance, shipping, brokerage, insurance, and intra-Asian trade (Cain and Hopkins 1993; Webster 2006; 2011a). Acting in symbiosis with the Company's fiscal militarism, British commercial capital mediated India's export-oriented integration into global capital flows. Private merchants played a critical role in making the Indian exports the pivot of an Asian "triangular trade," above all by smuggling Indian opium to China, which paid for the Company's tea imports and propped up Britain's balance of payments (Kohli 2020; Webster 2011b). In the process, agency houses came to command diverse investment portfolios and morphed into "the instrument through which Western market capitalism was being introduced to India … [B]etween the peasants producers in the Indian village, on the one hand, and the new external tie, the world market, on the other, the European commercial houses stood as a vital link" (Chaudhuri 1966, 346; also see Bayly 1987, 104–38; Chaudhuri 1971, 1–44; Webster 1987).

However, notwithstanding early attempts at plantation agriculture (Manjapra 2018), British capitalists' command over Indian, and more broadly Asian, commodity production in this period remained at best indirect. For procuring the exports they financed, agency houses commissioned local intermediaries, such as *banians* in India and Chinese *kongsis* in Southeast Asia, who mobilized the land, labor, and connections for production (Bayly 1987, 67; Webster 1998, 117–8; 2009, 10–1). As historians have noted, "Europeans owned very few of the 'means of production'" (Washbrook 2004, 492) and their enterprises relied predominantly on peasant labor recruited through the corporate tangle of caste, village, and kin (Bayly 1987, 119–20). Experiments with fashioning the Indian countryside into a system of cotton plantations unraveled in the 1840s (Florio 2016).[21] As a result, British commercial capitalism operated mainly by "vertically concentrating" dispersed peasant labor (Banaji 2020). It exerted pressure on production by rendering peasant households dependent on the "advances" from the agency houses and their local intermediaries, but it did not change the fundamental structure of production. Expressed through categories devised by Karl Marx (1976, 1019–38), commercial capital "formally subsumed" Indian peasant cultivation by dominating it through credit and coercion but left its technological and organizational composition intact. It stopped short of the "real subsumption" of agriculture, which would require overhauling the production process through the application of capitalist labor management and scientific agronomy.

Crawfurd devoted considerable attention to the operations of agency houses and their London connections (SCR, 64–70, 80–106). He noted that despite generating handsome returns to the deposits of Company employees and the loans from the City of London, private British capital in India did little to increase the output or improve the quality of the commodities in demand in Britain.[22] As indicated by his irascible comparisons of India's meager cotton, sugar, and coffee production to the profusion of American and Brazilian exports, his alternative vision was to reorganize cultivation in large-scale, European-owned plantations that would directly command local labor and integrate the operations of production, processing, and export. The Atlantic plantation as the most advanced unit of agrarian capitalism supplied the model.[23] It could be replicated in India without slavery because the subcontinent's teeming population obviated the problem of labor shortage that occasioned West Indian bondage. Surplus British capital and Indian labor and growing demand in Britain

[20] Crawfurd (1831) edited and annotated a series of letters by British investors in the Indian interior, pleading with metropolitan authorities on account of the difficulties caused by the property and justice system of the Company.

[21] Tea plantations in the following decades would be a different story (Liu 2020; Sharma 2011).

[22] Crawfurd was intimately familiar with both private merchants in the East and the manufacturing interests in northern England as he had liaised between the two during the 1829–1833 free trade campaign (Webster 2011b).

[23] The Atlantic plantation is now considered to be the progenitor of modern labor management based on real subsumption of labor (Blackburn 1997; Manjapra 2018; van der Linden 2010).

furnished all the necessary ingredients, while Chinese plantations in Southeast Asia presented the regional blueprint. The key obstacle remained the outdated Company despotism that obstructed British settlement and enterprise.[24]

Diagnosing the affliction as Company despotism also suggested the remedy. For liberating the private enterprise that could tow India out of its quagmire, Crawfurd deemed it imperative to implement legal reforms on principles of liberty, equality, and inclusion.[25] His list included the freedom to settle in India without license or fear of deportation, freedom to move without internal passports, freedom of enterprise without the interference of monopolies, and freedom to hold landed property (BCI, 11–2). Equality before the law would be secured by replacing legal pluralism by a civil and criminal justice system based on English laws and a uniform tax system, applicable to British-born and Indian subjects without exception.[26] Finally, to set the British on a "fair equality with their fellows subjects," the "unjust, ungenerous, and impolitic" exclusion of natives from civil and military positions of trust had to be ended and a "legislative council" open to "British and Indian subjects of all classes" established (BCI, 18; FTCI, 75). Apart from these reforms, no additional measures were necessary but to "exclaim in reference both to the East India Company and to the administration, in the language of the French merchants to the French minister, "Let us alone" (FTCI, 11).

If Indian cotton was to end Britain's dependency on American slavery; if British consumers were to enjoy cheap and free-grown sugar, rice, and coffee; if excess British capital was to flow into the "vast, and, in a practical sense, inexhaustible" field of investment in Indian plantations, mines, shipping and insurance (BCI, 10–11; SCR, 43); in short, "if India is ever to be rendered a valuable acquisition to this country" (FTCI, 16), then the only option was, Crawfurd asserted before the House of Commons Select Committee, the "free introduction of capital, enterprize [sic], and skill, under proper protection, under just and equal laws" (HCSC, 152). India had been conquered by arms; now it had to be colonized by capital.

## SETTLER COLONIALISM THROUGH ASIAN LENSES

Despite its metaphorical ring, "colonization by capital" accurately captures the peculiar form of colonialism that Crawfurd envisioned for India. He was aware of the oddity of proposing to "colonize" India, when most of his audience understood "colonization" as the process of permanently relocating white and mostly poor emigrants to overseas territories that were evacuated of their incumbents (O'Brien 2009). In grappling with this problem, he participated in a wider ideological effort to rethink the conceptual parameters, practical possibilities, and historical agents of colonization. To illustrate, in *Oriental Herald*, Say (1824, 357) cautioned, "it has not been sufficiently considered that India is not, properly speaking, a colony; that is, the English have never driven out nor destroyed the aborigines." The editor of the journal, Buckingham, retorted in a footnote, "It is by no means necessary, that the settlement of the English in India should lead to the immediate extermination of the Indians themselves… . A million Englishmen might settle in India, and, instead of diminishing, they might, by improved government, cultivation, manufactures, "&c," in the original, add a million to the native population also and still prepare the mans of subsistence for ten millions more." The theme of colonization without extirpation resurfaced in George Thompson's (1840, 47) speech to the British India Society. He lamented the "bitter fruits of European colonization" for "the Red Indian" before declaring "I would have our wharves covered with sugar, and cotton, and tea, and rice, and indigo of India, but I would not have a single native of the country enslaved or dispossessed." Macaulay Macaulay ([1833] 1975) inflected Bentinck's reveries of an Anglicized creole polity with a commercial ideal when he deemed it "far better for us that the people of India were well governed and independent of us, than ill governed and subject to us—that they were ruled by their own kings, but wearing our broad cloth."

Crawfurd's own case for colonization was rooted in political economy and stadial theory. "Colonization of India, in the strict meaning of the term," he wrote, "is impossible without the extermination of, or the very next thing to it, of above one hundred millions of human beings: we might as reasonably talk of colonizing Ireland, and exterminating the Irish!" (FTCI, 66). Unlike the "savages" of North America, who had been "hunted down and exterminated" by the erstwhile barbarous Europeans, Indians were an "agricultural" people, and "no agricultural people have ever been exterminated, even by the most barbarous conquerors" (FTCI, 68). For the "colonization of India" to make sense, the terms of colonization had to be stretched beyond their "strict meaning" to fit a populous agrarian society.[27] "Although

[24] Crawfurd's vision received a temporary spell of hope from Bentinck's reforms (1826–1835) only to be frustrated by the Indian "Black Act" defended by T. B. Macaulay. See Marshall (1990), Kolsky (2005), and Ehrlich (2018).

[25] Here Crawfurd's utilitarian investment in law as a weapon of social transformation came to its own, though he voiced these principles earlier in *History*. His plans for British settler colonies in Southeast Asia included "freedom of commerce and settlement to persons of all nations and religions," right to private property, representative government with control over taxation, and impartial administration of laws (HIA III, 209).

[26] Crawfurd defended race-blind rule of law earlier in *History*: "We have to legislate for Europeans, for Chinese, and for a mixed mass of native inhabitants. The law should make no distinction between them" (HIA III, 63, 67).

[27] The "strict meaning of the term" was popularized by the publicity efforts of Wakefield and the Colonial Reform Movement. As discussed below, Crawfurd was well aware and very critical of Wakefield's theory of colonization.

there may be no room for colonization, there is ample room for settlement, in a country, of fertile soil, far more thinly peopled, after all, than any part of Europe, and a country, too, without capital, knowledge, morals, or enterprise" (FTCI, 68). The dearth of capital and enterprise rather than population density proved decisive in construing India as an object of colonization, as evidenced by Crawfurd's assessment of the relative "room" that India afforded for various classes of British emigrants. "Mere day labourers, of course, there is, generally speaking, no room for; but there is ample room for skilful mechanics, for agricultural, for commercial, and even for manufacturing capitalists… . The first settlers … would naturally consist of capitalist, and the better order of mechanics" (FTCI, 69).[28] Squaring the circle of settler colonialism in India thus depended on redefining the intension of "vacant land" by representing the country as teeming with laborers but devoid of capital, technology, and management necessary to infuse labor with the power to create *value*.

It might be tempting to dismiss Crawfurd's proposal as something other than "colonization" because it defies the currently dominant definition of the term as a territorial structure of invasion (Wolfe 2006). Such a priori classification occludes the internal variegation of colonization as a notion and agenda in the first half of the nineteenth century. A careful look reveals that Crawfurd's idea of colonization stood in the Lockean pedigree that many scholars now consider to be paradigmatic of settler colonialism. At the core of this pedigree was the idea of "improving" land and labor through colonization. This point is recently stressed by Barbara Arneil (2021, 1) who distinguishes colonialism from imperialism on its being an "internal, and productive form of power that seeks to transform or improve people and land from within."[29] From the seventeenth century onward, the improvement of land acquired layers of meaning, including cultivation, increased productivity, market access, and rising land values and rents. Over the same period, labor featured at once as the subject and the object of colonization; in the very process of improving the land, laborers were assumed to undergo their own moral and economic improvement by becoming disciplined and "industrious."[30]

Crawfurd's plans for India retained this conceptual core of colonization but sought to expand it such that the improvement of land and labor afar need not depend on indigenous dispossession.[31] He admitted that Europeans of the previous three centuries had viciously decimated the indigenes because "the Indies were discovered at the first dawn of commercial enterprise, when mercantile cupidity had just awakened, but before trade had had time to produce its legitimate effects, humanity and civilization." (HIA II, 395). But, like many contemporaries, he deemed those times to be over.[32] At stake was the possibility of a new and civilized model of colonization, one that avoided both the American Scylla of expropriation and enslavement and the Indian Charybdis of despotic, extractive imperialism. This model retained the element of "settlement" as the locomotive improvement but shifted the socioeconomic valence of settlers from labor to capital. Nor was this an eccentric notion, contorted by Crawfurd to fit the Indian case. The arch-exponent of "classical" settler colonialism in the same period, Wakefield, held a comparable capitalcentric view of colonization. Merely resettling metropolitan labor on colonial waste lands, he argued, was not colonization proper but "pauper shoveling." Left to their own devices, settlers remained barbarous "earth-scratchers," improving neither the land nor themselves (Wakefield 1833, 493). Successful colonization for Wakefield would only obtain with the capitalist division of labor in the colony—that is, by concentrating land in export-oriented capitalist farms and subjecting colonial emigrants to the discipline of wage labor. For both Wakefield and Crawfurd, colonization was not simply a territorial project but a political economic enterprise that involved a definitive articulation of land with labor and capital in the service of the imperial economy.[33]

The articulation of land, labor, and capital also constituted the main site for the construction of social difference in Crawfurd's political economy. Both the semantic content and the hierarchical order of his racial categories drew from the language of civilization and savagery; civilization in turn, found its key analytic and evaluative metrics in the degree of subordination of the laboring process to capital. In this global civilizational matrix, Crawfurd distinguished Europe by its

[28] In this, he was joined by Roy (1925, 255) who recommended to the Select Committee that "the European settlers, for the first twenty years at least, should be from among educated persons of character and capital."

[29] By contrast, Arneil (2021, 1) defines "imperialism" as an "external and repressive form of power that dominates or rules over people from above and afar." She later notes that "colonialism and imperialism overlap and intersect conceptually and historically" and that "the nineteenth century imperial civilizing mission directed at "improving" custom-bound peoples was very similar to the principle of improvement in colonialism" (Arneil 2021, 9).

[30] The last point was shared across the British political spectrum from Radicals to Tories (O'Brien 2009).

[31] While scholars of settler colonialism today might balk at the "colonization of India," the term was not unintelligible to Crawfurd's contemporaries. Sismondi (1825, 229, 234) saw India's salvation in "improvement, and a desire for improvement" before concluding, "Colonization, which is nothing more than the advancement of the conquered people in civilization, was the imperious duty of the Government towards its Indian subjects."

[32] Say (1824, 359) echoed the sentiment: "Europe is no longer what it was in the times of Vasco de Gama and Albuquerque. It has reached that state in which Asia need no longer dread its dominion."

[33] The "economic" element in these colonization projects was in fact present in the Lockean paradigm, as discerning readers of Locke have shown (Arneil 1996; Pinheiro 2020). Locke's justification of colonial land appropriation did not simply divide the world into the binary of "waste" and "property" based on agricultural labor; it also introduced commercialization as an ordinal metric for measuring the degree of improvement. By infusing a jurisprudential theory of occupation with an economic content, this move laid the ideological basis for eighteenth-century stadial theories of progress (Fitzmaurice 2014).

embodiment of capital, skill, and technology. His Eurocentric institutionalism came to its own when he equated the "exclusion of European skill and capital" from India with "the exclusion of *all* effectual skill and capital" (FTCI, 30, emphasis added). This was not a rhetorical device of a pamphleteer but a broader political-economic premise of his stadial theory. In the third volume of *History*, Crawfurd deemed "science, ingenuity, invention, and intrepidity" to be "in every age, more or less, the birth-right of Europeans" (HIA III, 198). After quoting Smith's glowing remarks on the character and energy of American colonists, he turned the same light on the European influence in Asia: "Whatever is ennobling, or bears the marks of genius and enterprise in the civilization of the Asiatic nations, may fairly be traced to the European race" (HIA III, 205). Again in Smithian fashion, he attributed European socioeconomic progress to political institutions that provided security, order, and impartial administration of justice. Even the "worst governments of Europe," as exemplified by the Portuguese and the Dutch misrule in the East Indies, were "superior to the best governments of Asia, when they only forbear from interrupting the natural effects of European institutions, and the usual course of commerce and colonization" (HIA III, 268).

The evidence of the last point came from the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia, whose entrepreneurial energies were unleashed when they left the Qing Empire and its commercial restrictions for European settlements in the region. Chinese enterprise was especially significant for suggesting the lineaments of British settler colonialism with Asian characteristics. Although a demographic minority, the Chinese were the most commercially active group in the archipelago, managing most of the plantation agriculture and mining. Their investment in sugar cultivation and processing, which combined foreign capital with local labor, was exemplary of what profitable British colonization of India could look like. Sugar production, in Crawfurd's estimation, approximated to a branch of manufacturing, requiring skilled agronomy, large capital outlays, and economies of scale (SWS, 251).[34] These were the exclusive province of the "Chinese colonists." "The industry is theirs, the skill is theirs, the machinery is of their construction… . The natives of these countries furnish nothing but cheap labor. The Chinese supply the place of the European colonists in America;—the natives, the place of the negroes of the west, without stripes or bondage" (SWS, 251–2). What the Chinese had achieved, European skill and capital could readily surpass given the opportunity and turn India into a major source of colonial commodities grown with free labor.[35]

Accordingly, the settler colonial model to emulate in India was not North America but Singapore, a young colony that Crawfurd governed as the British Resident between 1823 and 1826. As a thriving colony of free trade, free settlement, and free labor with a diverse non-European population governed by uniform British laws and institutions, Singapore provided the ideational crystal of a reformed and productive empire in the east. Crawfurd boasted that the island had no restrictions on immigration and settlement, either by the British, the Indians, the Arabs, or the Chinese (JES, 381–2). No custom duties were levied on ships calling at its port, a point on which he took particular credit (JES, 377). And unlike the "free port" of Jamaica, Singapore had abolished slavery "under whatever name or modification" and "emancipated even the retainers of the native chiefs" (JES, 404–5). Together, these traits enshrined the island colony as "the first settlement, in which the principle of free trade and unshackled intercourse has been fully and fairly acted upon in India" (JES, 405; also see Quilty 2001, 145–7). Here, too, the British rose to the top in the racial hierarchy predicated on capitalist civilization and prefigured the benefits to be reaped from "the freest settlement of Europeans in India generally." "Few as the British settlers of Singapore are, they constitute in reality the life and spirit of the settlement; and it may safely be asserted, that without them, and without their existing in a state of independence and security, there would exist neither capital, enterprise, confidence, or order" (JES, 383).

In sum, Europe in general and Britain in particular represented the active elements of capital, enterprise, and their institutional stewards, standing in inverse yet complementary relationship to India as an inert mass of land and labor. Under Crawfurd's pen, categories of political economy coalesced into a hierarchical grid for ordering social diversity, one that fashioned particularizing racial traits out of a putatively universal theory of social development.

## PARTICULARIZING THE UNIVERSAL: A CAPITAL THEORY OF RACE

Insofar as the racial hierarchies in Crawfurd's writings tracked degrees of capitalist development—in the order of Britain, Europe, China, India, and Southeast Asia—it is more accurate to label his theory a *capital theory of race* rather than a racial theory of capital. In addition to his radical fidelities sketched above, Crawfurd's praise of Chinese presence as a civilizing force in Southeast Asia points beyond a priori binaries of European/non-European or white/non-white in detecting the effective lines of racialization in his political economy.[36] Returning to the logic of "capitalist

[34] The point of contrast was again the "careless culture and manufacture of small and poverty stricken cultivators" in India (SCR, 40).
[35] "Still, the skill and capital of the Chinese is inadequate to the production of the best sugar; and hence the sugars produced even by them, are inferior to those produced by European skill in the islands of America" (SWS, 253).

[36] Crawfurd credited "Chinese emigration" with "more than half the prosperity of all the countries in which it has occurred" as proof of "the efficacy of a little infusion of civilization into semi-barbarous countries" (FTCI, 70).

racialization" outlined earlier, I argue that Crawfurd adopted differential labor productivity, inferred from the variation in wages paid for the same type of work, as his yardstick for ordering various "races" in the scale of civilization.

Crawfurd's notion of "labor" followed classical political economy's category of value-creating labor (as waged or commodity-producing labor) whose productivity was measured by time and improved by subdivision and labor-saving technology. "Skill" was the codeword he employed to capture the total productivity gains to labor from capitalist organization. Like a composite index embodied in the laborer, it was "skill" that gauged the civilizational standing of the race to which one belonged. "Considerable civilization," was "one and the same thing [as] considerable skill and ingenuity" (SWS, 251). The most reliable of indicator of skill, in turn, was the market rate of wages paid to labor. Crawfurd's explanation of wage rates from skill levels complicated the Ricardian orthodoxy that held that wages were ultimately determined by the production cost of subsistence goods. After noting the meagre pay of an agricultural laborer in India, Crawfurd cautioned against "the conclusion that the wages of labour are proportionately low in India, and that consequently, the profits of stock must be in the same proportion, high." Such reasoning viewed only the costs of subsistence, failing to consider the productivity of Indian labor, or in Crawfurd's words, "the amount of labor well executed, the only criterion of the real price of wages" (SCR, 10). Still, the two premises were reconcilable under the assumption of civilizational isomorphism, whereby labor productivity and the basic wants of laborers were expected to rise in tandem with social advancement.[37]

Deduced from differential wage rates, the average productivity of abstract labor—measured by what Marx would later call "socially necessary labor time"—furnished a purportedly objective standard for ranking different races. Averaging the "relative productiveness of the Indian industry" across "artisans, mechanics, and cultivators," Crawfurd conjectured that "four are equal to one Englishmen," rescaling the "effectual productive" population of British India from eighty million to twenty million (SCR, 12–3).[38] Implicitly pegged to the gold standard of British productivity, Crawfurd's globalizing law of value extended to comparing non-European populations with each other. He estimated the "average value of the labour, skill, and intelligence of a Chinese to be in the proportion of three to one to those of native of the continent of India" (JES, 384–5).[39] Accordingly, "the wages of other classes of inhabitants are much lower than those of the Chinese, being proportionate to the value of their labour" (JES, 385). As Mary Quilty (2018) has argued, these conjectures were striking in that they referred not to laboring classes in separate countries (the axiom of Ricardian comparative advantage) but to the *same labor force* in the same domestic labor market. Unlike the earlier remarks on British and Indian labor, the last quote compared Chinese and Indian laborers residing in the British Straits Settlements (Penang, Singapore, Malacca). The variation in wages did not track specialized skills either, for Crawfurd's unit of comparison was a "common Chinese day laborer." He distinguished the better-paid "class of artificers" and found their wages to conform to the same civilizational hierarchy, this time in British India: "A Chinese artisan at Calcutta will earn four times the wages of a good Indian artisan" (CME, 27).

Differential wage regime in the same labor market contravened a key tenet of classical political economy—namely that the mobility and competition of labor would equalize wages for the same work. In an essay published in *Westminster Review*, Crawfurd himself declared that "in the same country, there cannot be two different rates of wages" (SWS, 450). The context of this statement was critical. Crawfurd's had in his sights Wakefield's project of "systematic colonization." Seeking to secure a reliable and cheap supply of wage labor in Australia, Wakefield had proposed to artificially inflate the price of colonial land in order to compel white emigrants to work for capitalist farmers. Crawfurd objected to this scheme on moral and economic grounds. Wakefield's plan to create a dependent colonial workforce emulated the "model … *which exists in slave colonies*" and strove to reduce emigrants to a species of "slavery and villeinage" (SWS, 448). The "forced concentration" of laborers might have suited the "barbarous countries of the East," but it was unfit and unfeasible for "an English Colony" of "free Englishmen" (SWS, 458–89). The plan was flawed because laborers facing high land prices and low wages would immediately relocate to the nearest settlement where "labor is better rewarded." The interplay of supply and demand would restore the "due

[37] The "Indian coolie" was as austere in his necessities as he was inept and slothful, while the Chinese industry and ingenuity was matched by borderline luxurious habits. A key transitional figure here was the Irish laborer that bridged the comparisons between metropolitan and colonial labor. Plans to import Indian labor to Australia were decried by analogizing it to the effects of Irish immigration on English wages (Quilty 2001, 236–7; 2018).

[38] The calculus of effective population was not only racialized but also heavily gendered. Labor for Crawfurd was by default male. Work performed by women, whether outside or inside the household, did not qualify as labor. For instance, he calculated Singapore's effective population to be much greater than the raw numbers suggested because the male-dominated Singaporean demographic yielded a larger workforce-to-population ratio. Similarly, he observed with bafflement that women in Cochin China performed the same kinds of labor as men and received equal wages, describing the first as "extraordinary" and the second as "unnatural" (JES, 334–5, 384–5).

[39] The point was reiterated with less sophistication by Leonard Wray, a Scottish planter in Ceylon, who contrasted the "trash … sent from India" to the "intelligent, enterprising, and industrious Chinese." Quoted in Manjapra (2018, 373–4). By the late 1840s, Crawfurd himself lost faith in the prospect of rehabilitating Indian labor for plantation agriculture. In an essay published anonymously in *The Examiner* (1848), he reviewed the record of "the Hindoos" in "performing efficient field labor within the tropics" and concluded that the "failure has been pitiable."

proportion" between labor and capital, thereby effecting a convergence of wages to their "natural" level (SWS, 450).

Juxtaposing Crawfurd's argument on wage convergence in Australia with his admission of wage divergence in Singapore and Calcutta throws into relief the *racializing* (as opposed to *racialized*) logic of his political economy. By this logic, supply and demand in the labor market were striated along civilizational lines such that wages converged within but diverged across civilizational brackets. Just as he had effectively equated "capital and skill" as such with European capital and skill, Crawfurd implicitly benchmarked the category of "labor" against European labor. Doing so, however, did not spell racial "exclusion" of Indian or Chinese labor from the laws of political economy but their subordinate inclusion in it as occupying the lower rungs of capitalist development reflected in productivity and wages. By adopting capital's law of value as the universal metric of "civilization" for ordering racial difference, Crawfurd fashioned his principles of hierarchical differentiation out of universal premises rather than as exceptions to them. The particularizing distinctions in his assessments, including the identification of Europe with capital and India with labor, the contrast between the entrepreneurial Chinese diaspora and their languid compatriots on the mainland, and the unequal remuneration of the Indian and the Chinese workers, all emanated from the same totalizing conceptual grid that rendered racialized units commensurable and computable within a unified framework of legislation and political economy.

Contrasting Crawfurd's and Wakefield's colonization theories further sharpens the logic of capitalist racialization in Crawfurd's thought. Wakefield had also heavily imbibed from the Scottish theories of civilization and was an active interlocutor of classical economists. His notion of civilization evinced an equally heavy capitalist bent. Yet, Wakefield's categories of civilization and savagery were more closely yoked to a historical and *relational* understanding of capital and shifted more readily across the European/non-European divide. For instance, the predominance of independent smallholders in settler colonies vexed him because it destroyed the capitalist division of labor, vitiated "labor" as a category of political economy, and threw the colonies back to a form of agrarian primitivism. He did not shrink from calling Americans "white savages," British settlers of Australia "Tartars," white South Africans "the most ignorant and brutal race of men," and Argentines "the savage descendants of Spaniards" (quoted in Ince 2018, 131). Capitalist civilization for Wakefield was not an inherent property that accompanied Englishmen to the colonies, but a historical achievement that had to be replicated by institutional engineering. In Crawfurd's account, by contrast, capitalist civilization subtly shaded from a historical and universal process into a durable set of social qualities that came to define different races at different stages of development. Through such subjective signifiers as "skill," "ingenuity," and "enterprise," sociohistorical relations of capitalism morphed into embodied properties of entire social groups that crystallized in their individual members. In this respect, capitalist racialization in Crawfurd's theory was, to borrow from Patrick Wolfe (2016, 10) "prior to and not limited to racial doctrine."

To conclude, Crawfurd articulated the particularistic determinations of race within the universal horizon of capital. The logic of particularization through universal categories was reflected in his construction of India and China as at once possessing the universal potential for improvement yet lacking the autonomous capacity to realize that potential without European agency. In more concrete terms, Indian labor could in principle be as productive as British labor but only with the direction of British capital under English institutions. The Chinese diaspora's enterprise, in turn, merely bore testimony to the power of European institutions and prefigured the colonization of India by European capital.

## CONCLUSION

"White managerial impulse" is the term David Roediger (2017, 103) and Roediger and Elizabeth Esch (2017, 123) use to describe American settlers' "claims to know how to manage 'negroes' better than Africans could manage themselves" and "to manage land better than the removed Indians who lived on that land." At the core of these claims is the self-proclaimed "ability to manage other races as a distinctly 'white' contribution to civilization." The foregoing analysis demonstrates a comparable white managerial impulse behind Crawfurd's presumption of European superiority in commanding Asian land and labor. At the same time, Crawfurd's and other reformers' vision of colonizing India was in crucial respects the inverted mirror image of the American settler-slaveholder formation in that it categorically rejected indigenous elimination, chattel slavery, and "the prejudice of *blood*, which is carried to so baleful an extent in the American settlements of every European nation" (NIA, 5). Despite crucial parallels, then, one cannot readily narrate the Asian story with the Atlantic script of slavery and elimination that grounds most of the racial capitalism literature. Taking seriously the ensuing conceptual disjoint raises three questions on capital, race, and empire that can inform future research.

The first question concerns the geographic and conceptual ambit of "racial capitalism." This paper has followed the contrasting imaginations of what is "surplus" in the colonies (land or labor) into alternative models of settler colonialism and economies of race, reaping insights from a transimperial analytic frame. Crawfurd's remarks on Indian and Chinese labor provide a glimpse into the distinct dynamics of capitalist racialization shaped by the articulation of the Asia-Pacific into the world market and global capital circuits. If the attempt to "deprovincialize" racial capitalism presented here is plausible, then it highlights the need for conceptual innovation to account for diverse episodes of capitalist racialization beyond the Atlantic. To

revisit the question posed by Jenkins and Leroy in the introduction, for racial capitalism to "travel to various global contexts" while remaining recognizable *as* racial capitalism, it has to retain a set of consistent conceptual features. While it is difficult to disagree with the editors' preference for keeping racial capitalism "flexible yet analytically rigorous" (Jenkins and Leroy 2021, 3), there is the real danger of conceptual overextension whereby the flexibility with which the term is invoked vitiates its rigor. To flag this danger is not to question the generative potential of racial capitalism as a research agenda but to caution against mistaking a broad framework for a clear, self-evident analytic category.

Settling on a precise definition of racial capitalism is neither likely nor, perhaps, desirable if one wants to retain its evocative power. The path to reconciling versatility and rigor might instead lie in developing mid-level concepts to elucidate specific practices of racialization that have accompanied specific vectors of capitalist expansion, intensification, and reorganization. Searching for comparisons and connections beyond the Atlantic can be particularly useful here by disclosing sociohistorical particularities baked into ostensibly general concepts and pushing researchers to elaborate alternatives. To get a theoretical handle on the "historically-specific racism (sic)" (Hall [1980] 2018) analyzed here, this paper has used Marx's concepts of formal subsumption, real subsumption, and commercial capitalism as well as their recent reappraisals from a colonial perspective. The resulting concept of "capitalist racialization"—a complete elaboration of which admittedly exceeds this paper—has helped focalize the concatenation of the law of value (capitalist standard of evaluation), civilization (principle of hierarchization), and racialization (reification of hierarchy) in the nineteenth-century Asian colonial context. Beyond whatever utility this construct harbors for an analysis of racial capitalism, it is an invitation to build similar concepts adequate to concrete formations of historical capitalism.

A second, kindred methodological point bears on the study of settler colonialism. The convergences and contrasts between Crawfurd's and Wakefield's blueprints reveal the internal variegation of colonization as an imperial practice, program, and ideology. The disagreements between the two thinkers should not blind one to the fact that they both labeled their projects "colonization"—projects of agrarian capitalist transformation of imperial peripheries—and were recognized as such by their audiences and interlocutors ranging from Bowring to the Bengali elite. The broader implications of such internal variegation remains subject to further study, but one immediate upshot is to highlight the limits of the currently dominant understanding of settler colonialism as a *sui generis* formation that strains comparison with other forms of imperial expansion. As Krishan Kumar (2021, 300) warns, "Too strong an emphasis on the distinction between colony and empire, and between colonialism and imperialism, inhibits the search for comparisons and parallels that can often be highly instructive."

As with racial capitalism, a comparative and connected perspective on settler colonialism stresses the need for conceptual threads that travel across contexts. This paper has found its thread in the "plantation" as a modular form of capitalist colonization and a specifically capitalist articulation of land, labor, and capital. In a bid to avoid collapsing the "colonial relation" into "capital relation" (Coulthard 2014), settler colonial studies have largely evacuated the elements of labor and capital of analytic significance and invested in the territorial aspect of colonization. The result has been an analytic frame that illuminates the North American and Antipodean cases but, as Robin Kelley (2017) has recently advised, leaves out of focus other colonial sites with significant settler presence. The ambitious, if aborted, attempt to remake India into a plantation economy, if not a plantation society, presents a good starting point for addressing this blind spot. In casting of European settlers as bearers of capital rather than labor, anticipating their permanent minority status vis-à-vis the indigenous population, dissociating settlement from expropriation, and analogizing "Chinese colonists" in Southeast Asia to "European colonists in America," Crawfurd did not so much jettison the regnant understanding of colonization as strove to expand it in line with the concrete exigencies of imperial political economy. The project to colonize India might have failed, but analyzing it in its own terms might still help us work toward a more differentiated category of settler colonialism.

Finally, the analysis presented here invites attention to the discourses of political economy and civilization as ideational precursors to the capitalist racialization of social difference. Crawfurd's position is particularly instructive. In his writings, one finds the Enlightenment discourse of civilization and savagery mediating between the universal categories of political economy and the hierarchical gradations of race. Crawfurd's theory was no doubt "Eurocentric" in its evaluative metrics, but this was—borrowing from Sinja Graf (2021)—an "inclusionary Eurocentrism," which plotted non-European institutions and practices *within* the totalizing map of capitalist civilization. Going a step further, one can interpret the racialized hierarchies of Crawfurd's political economy as indexing capitalism's genetic heterogeneity. If, as has been argued, capitalist expansion proceeds as much by the assimilation of existing social relations as their subordinate articulation and if historical capitalism is thereby characterized by heterogeneity as a matter of *necessity*, then it becomes easier to conceive of racialization as one of the principles of differentiation *internal* to capitalist development (Harootunian 2015). Pursuing this thread can bring us closer to the theoretical core of the premise, "capitalism has always been racial capitalism."

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

## ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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