

Title—Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview
Author—Lorenzo Veracini
Year—2010

Categories: Theory, Colonialism, Settler, Empire

Place: The World

Time: 1600-Present

Argument Synopsis:

Veracini's book is a theoretical reflection on how settler colonialism is distinct from colonialism. He argues that settler colonialism operated autonomously in the context of developing colonial discourse and practice. He suggests that settler colonialism is a global and transnational phenomenon that national and imperial historiographies fail to address adequately as such. Veracini criticizes colonial studies for failing to yet develop suitable interpretative categories for settler colonialism, which he, in part, seeks to achieve with this book. He posits that the dynamics of imperial and colonial expansion as well as a focus on the formation of national structures and on national independence have obscured the operation and presence of settler colonialism. Therefore his book seeks to address this scholarly gap surrounding settler colonialism.

Not all migrations are settler migrations and not all colonialism are settler colonialisms—Veracini urges for settler colonialism to be seen as structurally distinct from both. In particular, the book focuses on political traditions concentrated on autonomous collectives that claim both a special sovereign charge and a regenerative capacity. Settler migration operates with a register of sameness, contrasted with traditional migration which operates with a register of difference. He highlights how settler colonial phenomena establish a fundamentally triangular system of relationships, comprising metropolitan, settler, and indigenous agencies. The book is focused mainly on European settlers, but this does not suggest that non-Europeans have not been settlers themselves. Settler colonialism has traditionally been seen as a subset of colonialism; he points to Patrick Wolfe's intervention as the moment when it was first understood as an antitype category. Recent literature has continued to focus on the need to distinguish between colonial and settler colonial phenomena. Veracini engages with this literature and attempts to define settler colonial phenomena, as well as making a call to establish settler colonial studies as an independent scholarly field.

The book is organized into four chapters, each of which dealing with a specific aspect of the divide separating colonial and settler colonial phenomena. The first chapter proposes a framework for the interpretation of the structural differences between population economies of colonial and settler colonial formations. The second chapter outlines the specific nature of a settler colonial understanding of sovereignty—a political tradition that is crucially autonomous of colonial and imperial ones. The third chapter approaches the settler colonial mindset: a set of psychic states that are structurally distinct from those operating under colonial circumstances. The fourth chapter focuses on the different narrative forms underpinning colonial and settler colonial phenomena. He suggests that settler colonial phenomena has a mimetic character and a recurrent need to disavow which produces a circumstance where the actual operation of settler colonial practices is concealed behind other occurrences.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- A colony is both a political body that is dominated by exogenous agency and an exogenous entity that reproduces itself in a given environment
- Settler colonialism should be seen as structurally distinct from both migrations and colonialisms
- Although colonialism and settler colonialism routinely coexist and reciprocally define each other, they are not the same