

Is Israel a colonial state?

Israel was established because of the existence of a European racist and settler colonial ideology through the application of carefully and deliberately fabricated myths. But unlike classical settler-colonialism, Zionism and Zionists have never maintained an umbilical cord to a mother European country nor with plans solely to exploit local natives and resources. Instead, Zionism and Zionists argued for close cooperation with disposable surrogate superpowers, complete control of resources, and the expulsion of the indigenous population.

What is colonialism?

Colonialism is a type of imperialism in which the self-determination of a people is completely denied to them. Colonialism is practiced in two general categories:

i. Classic colonialism—a state takes over a territory outside its own territory and assumes unilateral control over the existing government. The colonial power typically does not transfer much of its own population into the territory—only administrators, some business people, and their families— so that the colony is not a whole society but an arm of the home society. This system usually relies on the indigenous people for labor and local governance and typically brings local people into the colonial administration.

ii. Settler colonialism—a population moves en masse into a territory and establishes itself as a complete new society there. Eventually, this society develops a national life and an independent state. This system may use indigenous people for cheap labor but holds them entirely outside the political system and may hold them outside the society entirely. Apartheid in South Africa and Israel are examples of settler colonialism.

Though the two kinds may mix, as in Algeria and Israel, the typical settler colonialism evolves out of class colonialism as mass immigration from the home country follows early colonial conquest. In Israel, the two kinds mixed from the beginning.

Is colonialism racist by definition?

In theory, no, but in practice, yes. The colonizer must always justify depriving the native people of self-determination, so some explanation is always invented. In Classic colonialism always developed ideas of racial hierarchy in which white people were at the top of the ladder. Later, when racial ideas lost credibility, this evolved into ideas of cultural backwardness. Settler colonialism is always racist, however, because the settler society must see the native people as “savage” or “primitive” in order to feel morally authorized to dispossess them.

What is the remedy for colonialism?

The remedy may only be achieved by returning the right of self-determination to the population. In classic colonialism, this was effected by giving political authority back to the indigenous population. The decolonized territory became an independent state run by the native people, or its elites. Typically, this was achieved by negotiating special deals with the colonial power that allowed it to retain its strategic advantages in the new state after independence.

Settler colonialism is far harder to resolve because the settler society has “indigenized” psychologically and politically and has no “home country” to return to. Native self-determination can be expressed only by redefining the nation itself: persuading the settler nation-state to give up its dominance of the political system and genuinely share power with the indigenous population.

South Africa is an example of such a national “reconstruction” in defeating apartheid. Other settler-colonial countries, such as several in Latin America, have not been able to achieve this—the indigenous people still struggle to redefine the nation in ways that truly include them. In some cases, such as the United States of America, the native people have nominally equal rights but are so overwhelmed by mass white settlement that they still feel they live in settler societies.

Is Zionism and the establishment of Israel a case of colonialism?

Yes, in both senses. It is classic colonialism because the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine was “viewed with favor” by the British government because it consolidated British control of territory near the all-important Suez Canal and the Middle East generally. It is settler colonialism because Jewish people moved en masse into the country looking for new lives and seeking to establish a new political community, and then because “indigenized” and created a separate Jewish nation-state.

The British were kicked out in 1947, so classic colonialism ended, leaving the new” imperial” United States of America as the ally. The Jewish settler society has embedded completely, however, and settler-colonialism continues. Resolving the conflict must follow the settler-colonial model: restore self-determination to the indigenous people by redefining the nation to include everyone in the territory and giving all the people an equal say in governance. This involves hard ideological, political, geographic, economic, and social effort with which to address old racism, prejudices, fears, and mistrust.

The transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa offers an example of the many kinds of work involved. The same example, however, shows that such a transition can be achieved quickly once the settler society may accepts the necessity of doing so.

Overview of classic and settler colonialism

OVERVIEW OF CLASSIC AND SETTLER COLONIALISM		
Factors	Classic Colonialism	Settler Colonialism
Examples	Most of Africa (e.g., Kenya, Algeria, Libya, west Africa, Rhodesia) and parts of Asia (e.g., India, Ceylon, Indochina)	Israel, South Africa, the US and Canada, Latin America, New Zealand, Australia
Main driver	The State (home government, European power)	The people (settlers)
Motive	Markets and natural resources	Land and livelihoods for individual farmers and entrepreneurs
Nationalism	Remains attached to the home country (e.g., Britain, France)	Separates from the home country & develops new local nationalism.
View of native people	OK as labour, rivals only for specific resources; useful for local government	Rivals for all land and resources; no role in local government
Racism toward native people	Racism varies; may serve justifications for ruling the population; tends to fuse with	Racism emerges from experience of “savages” who irrationally oppose peaceful settlement; is intrinsic to settlement.

	ideas of cultural backwardness.	
Policies toward native people	Accepts their presence otherwise as long as they are passive;	Rejects their presence entirely (except as cheap labour);
Actions toward native people	Co-optation; political suppression; sometimes forced labour, civilising mission, forced assimilation; violence and genocide only to suppress resistance to colonial interests	Expulsion to make room for the settler society; ethnic cleansing, genocide; sometimes forced or extremely exploitative labour.
Governance of native people	Sometimes top-down by colonial power; sometimes through "indirect rule" through local (native) authorities; sometimes assimilation/ education projects to train as part of colonial administration	Absolute exclusion: held outside the settler government; treated as exceptional outsiders; dealt with through special "native affairs" desks; treated as corporate groups via designated representatives
Methods to end colonialism	Transfer government to indigenous people	Democratise (combine settlers and indigenous people)
Fate of Colonizers	Most withdraw; some may stay as "advisors"; business people may stay and link to indigenous business people.	All stay: settlers must give up doctrines of superior race and rights; new nationalist discourse celebrating diversity.
Outcome	Difficult transition to indigenous rule; often period of corruption, dictatorship, civil strife; eventual normalisation.	Formal democracy; lingering racial tension; varying rates & kinds of social and economic mixture; eventual normalisation.