

## BOOK REVIEW

**Settling for Less: Why States Colonize and Why They Stop**

By **McNamee, Lachlan**, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023. xi+240 pp. £30.00 (pbk), £100.00 (hbk).

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Concerns about injustices perpetrated by colonial enterprises, past and present, animate a wide field of scholarly studies, not to mention a world of activism, in which settler colonialism is a key issue. In developing an original theory of the phenomenon, McNamee's thoughtful and clearly articulated study challenges certain common assumptions arising from racial and/or economic factors. These are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for colonization and their relevance is sometimes skewed in ways that do not reflect historical trajectories. Moreover, racism can be a driver of both colonization *and* decolonization.

Another point of emphasis is that the logic of state-sponsored colonization differs from that of colonization by private settlers whose interests are rarely identical and are too often conflated. A key finding is that certain aspects of modernization, found in economic/demographic trends, see potential settlers strongly attracted to urban centres where many more opportunities are available than in far-flung frontiers. This means that states seeking to populate and therefore secure peripheral areas with 'loyal' settlers, as distinct from potentially hostile border dwellers, often have difficulty in getting people to go there—and stay there.

In the first case study, however, McNamee illustrates a successful effort in state-led settler colonialism in West Papua driven by the twin logics of counter-insurgency and resource extraction. After the Dutch were ousted in 1962, resistance to Indonesia's re-colonization by indigenous West Papuans saw heavy-handed security measures (resulting in many thousands of deaths) accompanied by an influx of immigrants under state-sponsored transmigration programs. Around 300,000 migrants were attracted by opportunities in the resource-rich territory, paving the way for later private settlers. This also represents a prime case of a country rhetorically committed to decolonization but which has engaged in one of the most violent colonizing exercises in the post-war period.

Australia's Northern Territory case highlights the role of state security interests driven largely by 'defence anxieties'. But the state failed to induce 'loyal' white settlers to move to a region providing too few attractions. In the same chapter, McNamee shows that Australia failed to 'whiten' Papua New Guinea, mainly because of huge challenges in establishing infrastructure to exploit resources. Australia was eventually faced with either incorporating Papua New Guinea within its federal system or preparing the pathway to independent sovereign statehood. Interestingly, many Papua New Guinean leaders preferred incorporation into Australia but were pushed to accept independence.

The case of China shows two different outcomes in settling peripheries. From 1952 to 1972 China achieved much success in settling Xinjiang's northern border area with Russia—especially the oil-rich areas—with 'loyal' Han settlers, due at least partly to the state's capacity to coerce people to move. This capacity has been much diminished as capitalist marketization has changed the face of contemporary China. The more recent failure of state-sponsored settler colonialism in southern Xinjiang's Uyghur heartland, again driven primarily by security concerns, reflects a dearth of willing settlers even though there are resource-rich parts of the region.

The final substantive chapter goes beyond the case studies to provide comparative data from around the world, showing that the above cases are not exceptional. The data also reinforce the point that internal settler colonialism in parts of the global South, subordinating or 'cleansing' numerous ethnic/indigenous minorities in the process, constitute the majority of current cases (notwithstanding the obvious fact that Australia, New Zealand, the US and Canada are major instances of settler societies). A key finding is the relative absence of the phenomenon in countries reaching a GDP per capita of \$US6,000 by the late twentieth century. An exception to the general rule is the state

of Israel. Despite a high level of capitalist development, it has consistently colonized and cleansed in the name of security—as illustrated only too clearly by the current war in Gaza. Western colonizers, however, eventually settled for less and abandoned their far-flung empires. On the basis of the findings throughout, the conclusion makes a case for decolonization, rather than colonization, as constituting the highest stage of capitalism. No doubt this is a provocative claim, but it is well backed up.

Appendices for chapters 5 and 7 provide detailed explanations of data and methodology, enhancing the very thorough documentation throughout. Indeed, a major strength of the book is the attention to detail and provision of evidence-based findings—much of which is original—rather than generalized speculations driven by ideological commitments. It by no means offers any justification for colonialism but rather seeks to show many more nuances from a world historical perspective through which both Western and non-Western forms of the phenomenon are rigorously scrutinized. It is an excellent, highly accessible resource for scholars across a wide range of social science and humanities disciplines concerned with colonialism/postcolonialism/decolonialism.