The following is a response to Neve Gordon’s paper on ‘Democracy and Colonialism’, from *Theory and Event*. It has been written by Lorenzo Veracini, and only appears here.

This is a promising proposal for a paradigm shift: colonialism and democracy are not incompatible - they actually are a necessary prerequisite of each other: “Notwithstanding the widespread conception among democracy theorists that there is contradiction between the two, in this paper I contend that colonialism has served as a crucial component in the historical processes through which modern democracies were created and sustained” (p. 1). Of course, this insight, while convincing in relation to the French and British colonial empires, for example, is especially significant because it emanates from Israel, a situation where the two have been and currently are a visible function of each other:

The Israel case helps clarify that the colonial project is not merely the *other* of democracy. On the one hand, Israel’s colonial project [Gordon here only refers exclusively to the occupation that begun in 1967] is deployed to limit and unify the people and in this way helps manage democracy’s precarious and unruly elements. On the other hand, Israel’s truncated racialized democracy serves to preserve its colonial project since […] democracy is incessantly utilized to extend, hide and legitimate a colonial regime based on violent domination. Democracy, we see, has deployed colonialism to circumscribe itself (i.e., by demarcating and stabilizing the people); colonialism has needed democracy to produce its legitimation (p. 2).

Crucially, however, Gordon believes that Israel is “a unique case”: “the democratic project and the colonial project coexist within a contiguous space” (p. 2).

I disagree: settler democracies routinely collapse the two “projects”; indeed one structuring difference between colonial and settler colonial formations is that the fundamental dialectic between metropole and periphery is erased in the latter.

Referring to the activities of settlers in the colonies of democratic regimes, Gordon notes that settlers routinely exploited the “freedoms and civil rights that were conferred on them as citizens of their democratic state of origin in order to subjugate and oppress the indigenous population in ways that settlers originating from authoritarian regimes could not”, and that this has been the case in Israel as well (p. 2). But he is comparing *settler colonialism* (a circumstance in which the settlers on the spot are in charge) and *colonialism with settlers* (a circumstance where the metropole is in charge of both the settlers on the spot and the indigenous people). While colonialism is only democratic in the metropole and exclusivist in the periphery, settler colonialism is by definition simultaneously democratic and exclusivist in a periphery that is no longer a periphery. Israel is not an exception in the context of democratic colonialisms; Israel is a settler democracy. Gordon understands colonialism, but does not get settler colonialism, which is a pity, considering where his insight emanates from.

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