

Colonialism versus Imperialism

Political Theory

1–31

© The Author(s) 2023



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/00905917231193107

journals.sagepub.com/home/ptx



Barbara Arneil¹ 

Abstract

Contemporary scholars routinely argue colonialism and imperialism are indistinguishable. In this essay, I challenge this argument. While it is true the “colonial” and “imperial” overlap and intersect historically, I argue there is a central thread of modern colonialism as an ideology that can be traced from the seventeenth century to mid-twentieth century that was not only distinct from—but often championed in explicit opposition to—imperialism. I advance my argument in four parts. First, I identify key ways in which the colonial can be distinguished from the imperial, including most importantly the specific kind of productive power inherent in colonialism. Second, I examine how colonialism and imperialism evolve in meaning and are redefined by both champions and critics, in relation to each other in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries. Third, I examine the historical moment when colonialism and imperialism fully conflate after WWII through the UN process of decolonization as the “salt water thesis” delimits colonialism to mean foreign racialized domination, and it thus becomes synonymous with imperialism. I conclude with an analysis of why the distinction still matters in both theory and practice.

Keywords

imperialism, colonialism, domestic colonies, history of political thought

¹Political Science Department, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

Corresponding Author:

Barbara Arneil, Professor, Political Science Department, University of British Columbia, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1, Canada.

Email: arneil@mail.ubc.ca

Contemporary scholars routinely argue colonialism and imperialism are difficult if not impossible to distinguish. Kohn (2012) argues colonialism is the “practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another,” leading to “one of the difficulties in defining colonialism . . . it is hard to distinguish it from imperialism. Frequently the two concepts are treated as synonyms.” Pitts (2010) argues to “distinguish systematically between the imperial and colonial” is close to impossible because even if some argue the latter involves “extensive domination” and the former “substantial settlement,” the “official, popular, and even scholarly usage is unstable, and thus, the terms ‘colonies’ and ‘postcolonial’ are applied equally to spaces of significant settlement and to those without.” (213–14) Kumar (2021), in his article on possible differences between the colonial and imperial, concludes: “Colonies . . . are a part of empire [and] only have existence as manifestations of an imperial drive” (304).¹

While these scholars are correct that contemporary scholarship views them as indistinguishable, I argue colonialism not only can but should be distinguished from imperialism, even as they overlap and intersect historically and conceptually. To distinguish the two, we first need to define them. Some scholars² correctly argue it is impossible to posit a single definition for either. So, to be clear, the definitions I propose below are not definitive, exhaustive, or exclusive. Rather, I identify a central ideological thread in each, because if we do not define them, something profound is lost in our historical understanding of—specifically—colonialism since they became fully conflated with imperialism following WWII, as I shall discuss.³

-
1. Some scholars have pointed toward some kind of distinction. Said (1993) distinguishes the two but ultimately concludes colonialism “is almost always a consequence of imperialism.” (9) Wakefield (1830), Seeley (1883) and Finley (1976) argue British settler colonies are distinct from imperial dependencies. Bell (2013, 2016), Armitage (2012), and I (Arneil 2017) have all argued the colonial and imperial are distinct—from a more critical perspective.
 2. “[The colony is] always unstable and precarious, plagued by . . . becoming another sort of entity” (Stoler 2011, 2). “Attempts to establish general theories of colonialism . . . encounter problems . . . rooted in the ‘experiential plurality’ . . . overly stipulative definitions should be resisted” (Butt 2013, 893).
 3. While the title of my article is “Colonialism versus Imperialism,” my focus is really on colonialism as I see it as the misunderstood term—the analysis of imperialism is really limited to identifying how it differs from colonialism and then also overlaps and/or diverges as both evolve.

My core argument is that a central *thread* of modern colonialism from the seventeenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, rooted in the Latin *colonia* and animated by an internalized, penetrative, and productive form of power that seeks to segregate and “improve” “backward” people(s) from within and “improve” “waste” lands, overseen by colonial authorities living among and/or in close proximity to the colonized, *is distinct from* a central thread of imperialism, rooted in *imperare*, animated by a sovereign form of power that seeks to dominate “naturally inferior” subjects and vast territories from above and afar, justified—at least initially—through war and conquest.

If colonialism and imperialism are distinct and recognized as such for centuries, my second goal is to explain when and why they became fully conflated, rather than accepting this simply as a given in contemporary scholarship.⁴ And I conclude by showing why the distinction still matters—in theory and practice. For political theorists, it allows us to identify specific and distinct threads of settler colonial, domestic colonial, and/or imperial arguments—and their opposites—combined in a variety of ways, in the writings of multiple key modern political thinkers. In *practice*, it allows us to identify how the specific form of colonial power, rooted in the principles that define colonialism, manifests itself in the profoundly negative impacts on those subject to it in colonial institutions and processes.

Two important points in defining imperialism and colonialism before we get to the substance of the argument: first, I define both as *ideologies*,⁵ animated by a central set of comprehensive arguments/principles that modern European⁶ thinkers advance to convince a larger audience of the benefits of imperial processes and/or colonization. Colonialism and colonization are thus also distinct, as I have argued:

[There] are important analytical distinctions between . . . *colonization* (historical *processes* through which people were colonized) . . . and *colonialism* (a

-
4. This argument has underpinned previous research (Arneil 2017, 2021), but this article represented the fully worked out analysis of exactly how they are different as well as how they became conflated and why this distinction still matters.
 5. Ideology is “clusters of ideas . . . that provide directives, even plans of action . . . to uphold, justify . . . the social and political arrangements of a state or other political community” (Freeden 2004, 6).
 6. Kumar rightly argues empire is a category of the “world and not just Western history,” given the existence of imperial powers throughout the world. I focus on modern European colonialism and imperialism.

common ideology used to justify such entities and processes) . . . [found in] the writings of leading . . . colonialists of the period. (Arneil 2017, 3)

While I recognize colonialism and imperialism—both in common parlance and academic scholarship—are used to describe practices/processes, I define them as ideologies for several reasons. First, because doing so is consistent with other “isms,” and second, to gain analytical purchase and focus on the specific written arguments political theorists advance to *justify* colonial and/or imperial power even if those thinkers were not involved in implementation or practice—that is, it focuses us on the *justifications* for certain processes and policies. Finally, describing certain theories in defense of colonies as ideological allows us to see how some thinkers advance an argument they know to be untrue because of its importance to their *ideological* purposes. For example, in the *Second Treatise*, Locke posits indigenous peoples are idle and territories in America are “waste,” even though he was familiar with accounts in his own library that contradict these propositions—such as indigenous peoples who taught settlers how to grow certain crops. Claiming land to be uncultivated and indigenous people idle were necessary to his colonial agrarian labor theory of property that allows settlers in America to claim property in land.

The second important point in defining colonialism and/or imperialism is it requires, as Getachew and Mantena (2021) have argued, a “historically attuned and comparative approach” that incorporates non-Western, Black, and/or indigenous scholars and their critiques of empire and/or colonization (359). In this analysis, I try to adopt such a global/comparative approach and draw from the critical analyses of various non-European thinkers who were subject to colonialism and/or imperialism, along with thinkers seeking to justify either/both.

I advance my argument in four parts. In the first section, I identify key differences between the colonial and the imperial, beginning with their distinct etymological roots, before turning to what I see as the first comprehensive defense of modern settler and domestic colonialism, by John Locke and Jeremy Bentham, respectively. In both cases, they use the same three principles of segregation, agrarian labor on waste land and improvement of people and land through colonial processes and/or institutions and overseen by authorities living among/in close proximity to the colonized. Colonialism is defended by both Locke and Bentham in explicit opposition to imperialism—conquest and domination from above/afar.

To demonstrate the distance between imperialism and certain kinds of domestic colonies and colonialism, I turn to three domestic utopian colonialist thinkers: Washington (1912), who defends African American colonies in America, and Tolstoy (1900) and Kropotkin (1898), who defend Doukhobor colonies in Canada. Both colonies are seen as vehicles to fundamentally challenge racism or state power, militarism, and capitalism, respectively. And thus, for their champions, colonies can oppose rather than facilitate domination. I conclude with an analysis of the distinctive, productive form of power in colonialism, including both its psycho-affective and material dimensions via arguments advanced by both Fanon (1994) and Coulthard (2014).

In the second section, I examine how imperialism evolves in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as it shifts away from conquest and toward civilizing missions, development, and democratization—as it overlaps with the colonialist principle of improvement. I then analyze how Indian thinkers challenge civilizational narratives to instead embrace *swaraj* (self-rule). By the early twentieth century, imperialism is again redefined—by European anti-imperialists Hobson (1902) and Lenin (1917)—as a global *system* of capitalist exploitation and extraction rather than a specific metropole’s domination of its colonies. Many African and Asian leaders adopt this new definition of imperialism and recast their own fight for national independence as *anticolonialism*, inside a larger international anti-imperialist struggle.

A striking example of how these two distinct threads are brought together in the first half of the twentieth century is the Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in 1927, which, in the end, created the League Against Imperialism *and* for National Independence. Bringing together European *anti-imperialist* communists with Asian, African, and South American *anti-colonialists*, it fought *both* colonial oppression via self-rule/national independence and the international system of imperialism within which they were all embedded. Through this League, we can see how ideologies and practices of colonialism and imperialism can be perceived to be distinct yet interconnected by leading figures who opposed either/both.

In the third section, I analyze how imperialism and colonialism became fully conflated. After WWII, leaders of formerly colonized peoples in Asia and Africa fought for emancipation from imperial masters through national self-determination within a newly minted UN system. This process led to the adoption of the “salt water thesis,” which required an ocean between the colonizer and colonized both by the UN and in Bandung. And colonialism is

now redefined to mean—exclusively—*overseas racialized domination*, and thus it becomes synonymous with imperialism. This new definition, however, excluded indigenous peoples and those subject to domestic colonialism from its remit, even as it provides enormous rhetorical power to the word colonialism for those seeking to challenge various forms of domination. I thus conclude the section with an analysis of how colonialism has been re-deployed by scholars of “internal colonialism” to be a metaphor for domination by states over various groups within their own borders exactly because the word has negative rhetorical power. But the internal colonialism scholarship, as Jodi Byrd argues, has also led to further marginalization of those actually subject to colonialism in historical practise. In the final section, I analyze why the distinctions I have drawn between imperialism and colonialism still matter in both theory and practice.

Distinguishing the Colonial from the Imperial

Colonia vs Imperare and Settler Colonialism vs Imperialism

The imperial and colonial have different etymological foundations that create distinct trajectories or path dependencies in their corresponding modern ideologies. Imperial originates in the verb *imperare*—to dominate—foreign peoples and lands. Colonial originates in the Latin noun *colonia*, meaning agrarian settlements, closely linked to *colere* (to cultivate) and *colonus* (agrarian laborer). *Colonia* were agrarian settlements to which “excess” people were resettled from a mother city (metropolis)—separate, “empty” locations in a foreign land where they were to engage in agrarian labor to sustain their existence and remain independent.

Rooted in these ancient foundations, imperialism seeks to justify the imperial metropole’s right to *dominate* foreign lands and peoples deemed to be inferior, from above and afar, based on conquest but evolved to a language of civilization and development. Colonialism rooted in *colonia* is a modern ideology characterized by three principles: segregation, agrarian labor, and “improvement” of both “backward”—meaning idle, irrational, and/or custom bound—people and “waste” or “empty” land via labor and/or education.⁷ It

7. I use scare quotes on “idle,” “backward,” “custom bound,” “irrational” people, “empty,” “waste” land, “improve,” and “improvement” because they are culturally loaded. For ease of reading, I drop them in the rest of the article but should be read in the same way when deployed in colonialist arguments.

thus provides a comprehensive set of arguments to justify colonies in foreign lands and/or domestic colonies inside the borders of their own state—with the goal of improving both idle/irrational people and waste lands in explicit opposition to the ideology of imperialism, even as, in practice, they were often interwoven on the ground.

John Locke is the first to develop a comprehensive⁸ defense of colonialism in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1988) as he justifies the dispossession of indigenous peoples based on the right of settlers to claim exclusive private property in “uncultivated” land in America based on labor. “God gave the world to men in common . . . it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational (and labor was to be his title to it)” (Treatise II, 5: ¶35). Locke argues engaging in agrarian labor on “waste” land creates private property in limited allotments to create both *economic and ethical* benefits that imperialist conquest over large swathes of territory cannot (Arneil 1996).

Economically, agrarian labor on enclosed parcels of waste land produces food and wealth for those laboring on it, as well as profits for colonizers via the sale of cash crops and increased value of land—“a hundred-fold.”⁹ Further financial benefits are reaped domestically in England as paupers and petty criminals are employed on ships for trade or become indentured servants/settlers in colonies. As they are made industrious, the money otherwise spent on workhouses, relief, and/or prisons is thus saved. Ethically, Locke argues idle/custom/habit-bound paupers and/or indigenous peoples also have “more conveniences” once transformed into industrious citizens.

While Locke defends colonialism, he simultaneously and explicitly rejects imperialism in at least three ways.¹⁰ First, he argues imperial conquest—despite its popularity—provides no basis for claims “over . . . the possessions

8. Locke, of course, is not the first to articulate these claims; he draws on arguments advanced by John Winthrop, Robert Cushman, Robert Gray, William Strachey, and George Peckham (see chapter four of my book *Locke and America* (Arneil 1996). But I call Locke’s argument the first comprehensive defense because he crystallizes a variety of these claims from previous tracts into a single argument anchored in private property and he integrates this into his larger political theory that has property at its core.

9. The economic dimensions—capitalist or proto capitalist—are important. See Arneil (1994), Ince (2018), and Pinheiro (2022).

10. Locke’s role on the Board of Trade in the 1690’s and the power he exercised with respect to both Ireland and American colonies as a representative of the

even of those who were actually engaged in [war].” He adds, “this, I doubt not, but at first sight will seem a strange doctrine, it being so quite contrary to the practice of the world . . . the practice of the strong and powerful, how universal soever it may be is seldom the rule of the right” (II ¶16: 178, 180). Second, he rejects imperialist claims to sovereignty and/or property rights over large swathes of territory based on conquest and instead repeatedly calls on settlers to limit property to what they can cultivate in Carolina, New York, and Virginia. Thus, in 1674, as Secretary to the Lord Proprietors of Carolina, he calls on the Council to be “observant of our orders . . . take up noe more lands than what they had use for” and avoid “scattered Settlement and large Tracts of ground . . . not like to bee planted these many years.”¹¹ Goldie (2021) argues, in his first Carlyle lecture, “Empire, Property and the New York Land Question,” that Locke does the same on the Board of Trade, denouncing those who claim large tracts of uncultivated land in New York. Thus, colonialists—at least in theory—argue for small allotments, limited land, and concentrated settlements while warning against dispersal of people and/or taking up too much land, especially when left uncultivated.

The final way Locke rejects imperialism is his repudiation of the hierarchical ordering of populations based on natural racialized superiority. Both Turner (2011) and David Armitage advance this argument based on the following sentence from the *Essay*: “Had the *Virginia King Apochancana*¹² been educated in England, he had, perhaps, been as knowing a Divine, and as good a Mathematician as any in it” (Locke 1975, Vol. 1:4 ¶13, emphasis added), While I agree that Locke rejects indigenous

London metropole can be seen as a form of imperial rule in practice even as he defends colonial principles. I want to thank Daniel Layman for this insight. See also Mark Goldie’s Carlyle lectures and Pinheiro (2022), who analyzes Locke’s views on Ireland as a board member.

11. Letter from Lord Proprietors to Council at Ashley River, 18 May 1674, signed by Locke in the *Collections of the South Carolina Historical Society*. B. Carroll (ed.), Charleston, 1897, 435–38.
12. Apochancana has various spellings—most notably, Opechancanough (1550–1646). As chief of the Powhatans, he was central to the powerful Powhatan confederacy and led attacks against English settlers, including one at Jamestown in 1622. Locke deliberately uses his name in later editions of the *Essay*, replacing Totopotomy, because of his fame in England and to demonstrate even the most “violent” indigenous person (as viewed by colonialists) could—with education—be assimilated.

people being inferior by nature, as a colonialist, he embraces their being backward by custom. This is clear from the sentence immediately following the one quoted previously: “The difference between Apochancana and a more improved English man lying barely in this, that the exercise of his Faculties was bounded within the Ways, Modes, and Notions of his own country” (1:4 ¶14).

Thus, it is Apochancana’s Powhatan “ways, modes and notions” that prevent him from being “improved” like English settlers. To facilitate improvement, Locke is clear he is to be educated “*in England*”—segregated from his own people—so he can break free from his customary ways of thinking, being, and worshipping to adopt European arts, sciences, and Christianity (which Locke sees as universal truths rather than culturally bounded knowledge). The phrase “educated *in England*” underlines how important segregation is to improvement/assimilation in settler colonialism.¹³ As such, the ideological thrust of colonialism is not to dominate or compel indigenous peoples to convert or assimilate by force, but for the colonialist to create the environmental conditions that will lead indigenous people to change from within, “voluntarily.” And thus, in Locke’s colonialism we find an embryonic—but unmistakable—commitment to a productive form of power that rejects conquering and dominating “inferior” people from above and afar but fully embraces the transformation of “backward” bodies/minds from within—via agrarian labor, segregation, and European “education”—all closely overseen by colonial authorities.

Domestic Colonialism vs Foreign Imperialism

A second key difference between modern imperialism and colonialism is while the former is always directed at foreign peoples and lands, the latter could also be directed at domestic populations deemed to be backward—the idle poor and/or irrational of Europe—sent to domestic colonies within the borders of their own state, from the end of the eighteenth century until early twentieth century (Arneil 2017). Bentham (2010) provides the first comprehensive defense of domestic colonialism in his 1797 essay, *Pauper Management Improved*, as he lays out a massive national pauper panopticon

13. Contemporaries of Locke understood how important segregation was to improvement. Farr (2009) notes that Henry Sacheverell writes a marginal note in his copy of Locke’s *Essay* that ‘Negro Slaves . . . once removed from the darkness of their native country, have displayed prodigious abilities’. (45–46)

scheme he explicitly calls “domestic colonization.”¹⁴ In his vision, the entire population of paupers would be sent to colonies on waste land in the countryside and engaged in agrarian labor to improve the land and better themselves. Overseen by a joint stock company, rather than the state, these colonies were to produce profits for their private investors. Like Locke, Bentham defends the ethical (greater happiness) and economic benefits (profits) of domestic colonies in explicit opposition to both imperialism and, for most of his life, settler colonialism.

In his final two years, Bentham—realizing his pauper panopticons would never be built—writes a settler colonization proposal for Australia at the invitation of Edward Wakefield (Arneil 2021). This proposal parallels his domestic colony one: rooted in agrarian labor/waste land and run by a joint stock company, with the same claimed economic and ethical benefits. Even here, Bentham opposes imperialism, by which he means an imperial metropole (London) having authority to govern the colony from afar. He compares this to ruling from the moon. Instead, settler colonial powers—living among the colonized—have political authority. For Bentham, like Locke, it is the close daily management of land and people that is key to the success of colonies and thus he defends a physical concentration of settlers. Hence his proposal is subtitled, “Vicinity maximizing principle,” by which he means minimizing the outward spread of settlers. Bentham also defends colonial authorities’ right to “extirpate” indigenous people in Tasmania even when London—the imperial metropole—argues against it (Arneil 2021; Laidlaw 2022).¹⁵

Perhaps the largest difference between colonialism and imperialism is found in the utopian domestic colonialism of people like Washington (1912), Tolstoy (1900), and Kropotkin (1898). For all three, colonies were vehicles used to challenge racism or capitalism, private property, and the state, respectively. Washington argues voluntarily segregated colonies by and for African American freed slaves allow them to not only cultivate their own private property in equality and freedom, apart from a profoundly oppressive white supremacist society in the American South, but also demonstrate their capacity of for all aspects of citizenship.

14. Bentham is not the first to defend this—Arthur Young and Sir John Sinclair did so first—but his proposal was comprehensive in the sense it was a national scheme of colonies or panopticons on ‘waste’ land for *all* paupers (Arneil 2021).

15. For Ince (2018), Wakefield sees colonies in Australia also through an *imperial* division of labor—they are hinterlands growing crops for the metropole.

Doukhobor colonies in Canada—championed, financed, and negotiated by Tolstoy and Kropotkin and rooted in agrarian labor and improvement of “waste” land—were likewise a means to achieve radical political ends: anarchism, pacifism, and collective ownership and cultivation of land (Arneil 2017). Both examples show colonies, in a limited way, could be defended as the means to challenge, rather than facilitate, domination.¹⁶ However, it should be noted such colonies also required settler colonization/dispossession of indigenous lands to exist at all.¹⁷

Power in Colonialism vs Imperialism

The final, and most important, way colonialism is distinct from imperialism is the power animating each ideology, as alluded to previously. Imperialism, characterized by a foreign, overseas sovereign power dominating naturally inferior others from above and afar is rooted, at least initially, in conquest. European imperial powers, from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, use the natural law of war to claim *imperium* over large swathes of conquered land. Imperial subjects’ main duty was obedience to a superior race and overseas metropole. Increasing economic and political glory of the empire was the primary goal, rather than improving people or land, although the language shifted in the nineteenth century toward the latter, as shall be discussed shortly.

Colonialism, on the other hand, is animated by an internalized, productive form of power from its inception: colonizers live within and among the colonized—viewed as “backward” rather than inferior—meaning idle in body and/or custom bound/irrational in mind. Colonialism does not seek obedience so much as the improvement of idle bodies (becoming industrious) and irrational minds/souls (rejecting “backward” language, habits, customs, and/or spirituality and adopting more “improved” ways of being, knowing, and/or worshipping) via education, training, and labor. Just as idle bodies, whether indigenous peoples or European paupers, were transformed into industrious citizens through agrarian labor, waste land was transformed through cultivation and enclosure into revenues/profits. Resistance to settler colonial assimilation and/or the private property produced by colonization was met by

-
16. Important caveats: these utopian colonies were few in number, voluntarily chosen, failed quickly, and required settler colonization to exist at all.
 17. For the specific indigenous peoples displaced by both kinds of utopian colonies, in Canada and America, see Arneil (2017, ch. 8).

redoubled efforts on the part of settler colonial authorities to effect the transformation of people and land. As settler colonization expands its reach and indigenous peoples continue to resist and attack the power exercised over them and their territories, colonial powers increasingly embrace policies of residential schools, genocide, extirpation, elimination, and/or disavowal.¹⁸

The internalized nature of this productive power can, of course, be attributed—in part—to Michel Foucault,¹⁹ but its specifically colonial nature is best articulated through two key anticolonial thinkers. Frantz Fanon and Glen Coulthard analyze both the psychosocial aspects of internalized colonial power and the political economy of land and territory under colonialism. In *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon (1994) outlines how colonizers, living among and ruling over colonized peoples, create negative self-understandings that persist into postcolonial states. In the *Wretched of the Earth*, he argues, African peasants are the class to revolt against economic exploitation. Coulthard (2014), using Fanon and Marx, describes the internalized nature of colonial power as “the imposition of the settler’s gaze” inflicting “damage at both the individual and collective levels” (33) through assimilation and argues capitalism and colonialism have led to the material dispossession of indigenous territories as well as the colonial exploitation and extraction of resources.

For Fanon and Coulthard, the internalized, psychological, and material dimensions of colonization must be critiqued, resisted, overcome, and expunged. Fanon sees violence as necessary to remove the colonizers, and the colonized must continue to purge themselves of negative self-understandings long after the colonizers are expelled. For Coulthard (2007), indigenous peoples must “turn inward and away from the master”—the settler state—to repair the profoundly internalized psychological damage of colonialism and rebuild indigenous relations, their collective sense of identity, and noncapitalist economics through “resurgent” indigenous praxis (454), with a goal to reestablish grounded normativity and healthy kinship between people, creatures, and land. While both provide profound critiques of colonial power, they also simultaneously create radical, universal, theoretical alternatives to Western colonial thought and practice.

18. Bentham defends the right of settler colonialists to engage in the extirpation of indigenous peoples in his Australian proposal. Wolfe (2006) and Veracini (2010) see settler colonialism as “elimination of the native,” and Kevin Bruyneel sees it as the “disavowal” of indigenous peoples.

19. For a more detailed analysis of Foucault’s theory of power, its relationship to internal and foreign colonization, and its limitations, see Arneil (2017, 154–67).

Colonialism and Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Colonialism and imperialism evolve in meaning with the changing context of global history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, leading them to overlap and intersect in several ways. First, European imperialists increasingly replace conquest as justification for imperial power with appeals to civilizing missions, development, and/or democracy, thus moving toward the colonialist principle of improvement of those deemed to be backward. J. S. Mill's argument that those living in a nonage must give up their customary ways and embrace individualism parallels Locke's call for indigenous peoples to give up their 'ways, modes and notions' and be more like the improved English settlers. (Although Locke's emphasis on improvement of waste land and agrarian labor makes his theory distinctly colonial).

Conquest does not disappear entirely (particularly in metropolises) but the ideas of "progress" and development become primary justifications for nineteenth-century imperialists, along with arguments rooted in commerce and trade. Chakrabarty (2000) argues improvement via civilization and against custom becomes endemic to European liberal and Marxist thought but articulated in different ways. Mantena (2010) argues as important as development and civilization were for liberal imperialists, by the late nineteenth century, the contradiction between domination and improvement creates a crisis, leading British imperialists to defend imperial power less in normative and ideological terms and more as "pragmatic . . . practical responses . . . accommodations" with "civil society," leading to culturally pluralist indirect forms of rule within empire as alibis. (22)

The European imperialist emphasis on civilizing missions was challenged by South Asian intellectuals. "Indian political thinkers of the period questioned the civilizational language of their metropolitan counterparts" (Mantena 2010; Sultan 2020, 83). At the center of this fight was the principle of *swaraj* or self-rule. Dadabhai Naoroji, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Bipin Chandra Pal defend *swaraj* along with "progressive development" (Mantena 2016, 305) within empire, but in noncivilizational terms. As Sultan (2020) argues, this leaves, "the underlying framework of development . . . unchallenged," (83) which, in turn, leads to a paradox in relation to democracy, as the very population "taken to be the object of development . . . [who is] yet to become *the* people . . . [cannot] simultaneously be summoned as the authorizing power underlying the claim to self-rule" (81).

One solution provided by Naoroji (1917 [1866–1915]) to reconcile democracy, self-rule, and development within British imperial sovereignty is for Indians to exercise “self-government like that of the United Kingdom or the Colonies”—meaning Australia and Canada (73). While this proposal was rooted in a defense of the racial equality of imperial subjects (be they Indian or white), it overlooked colonial “self-“ government in Canada and Australia being predicated on settler sovereignty *over* indigenous peoples and their territories.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, imperialism was again redefined, this time by European critics of imperial power—Hobson (1902) and Lenin (1917)—as an international system of late-stage capitalist exploitation and expropriation rather than a specific metropole’s domination of a particular “territorial possession” or colony. It is striking even as Lenin critiques imperialism that he still uses the colonial language of “backwardness” in describing colonized peoples and countries. In *Imperialism: Highest Stage of Capitalism*, he writes of ‘backward countries’ and the ‘backward state of agriculture’; in “Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions” (Lenin 1920), he refers to backward ‘countries’ and ‘nationalities’, and calls on communists to support bourgeois “progress” *only* if it forwards proletarian ends. Some attending the Second Communist International (Lenin 1920) “denounce its predecessor” for this language. Indian communist M. N. Roy notes that for “the pre-1914 international . . . the world did not exist outside of Europe” (Ridell 2020, 100).

In February 1927, the Comintern responds to such critiques by supporting a Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in Brussels. This five-day meeting brought together “all forces against imperialism *and* colonial oppression” (Louro et al. 2020, 45), meaning European communists and socialists fighting *imperialism* as the last stage of capitalism, with leaders of global south liberation movements (from South America, Africa, and Asia) fighting against *colonial oppression* and for national independence from specific European powers. At the end of five days of meetings, a new organization was born—often referred to as the League Against Imperialism but whose full name was the League Against Imperialism *and for National Independence*.

The last three words in this organization’s title as well as the term “colonial oppression” in the title of the Congress that created it both speak to the distinction between a global south who, by the beginning of the twentieth century, increasingly saw their struggles as “*anticolonialism* within a larger

fight against an international system of imperialism. Imperialism was thus both distinct from—and connected to—colonial oppression. Even the word “League” alludes to the international nature of imperialism, as the use of that particular name was a “direct attack on the League of Nation’s . . . paternalistic imperialism”²⁰ (Prashad 2007, 21).

As Sultan argues, Jawaharlal Nehru, who attended the Congress, begins his anticolonialism in India with a “historical substantiation of the Lenin-Hobson thesis on imperialism.” By the 1930s, the geographic scope of “colonialism” was further narrowed. “[In] the interwar era, an overlapping consensus emerges . . . between metropolitan and anticolonial thinkers [that] the geographical reference of [the colonial is now limited to] Asia and Africa” (Sultan 2022). By the middle of the twentieth century, *anticolonialism* internationally was largely associated with African and Asian efforts to liberate themselves, expel imperial powers from their lands, and establish national independence. This fundamentally shaped the post-WWII world.

In summary, I have tried to show how nineteenth-century European imperialists shift away from conquest, as justification, to civilizing missions/development, which leads imperialism as an ideology to increasingly overlap with the long-standing colonialist principle of improvement of custom-bound people through education (since Locke). At the same time, commercial and political interests in European metropolises justify empire in economic and/or “pragmatic” terms. By the twentieth century, a new definition of imperialism as an international system of capitalist economics championed by Lenin and Hobson is adopted by many Indian and African critics of imperialism who saw their own struggles as anticolonialist—expelling specific powers from their territories—within this larger system. Thus, in the first half of the twentieth century, despite various overlaps between colonialism and imperialism, the distinction between the two is still recognized in the title of the 1927 conference (Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism) and the organization born out of it (League Against Imperialism and for National Independence), as European communists fighting imperialism came together with anticolonialists seeking liberation from overseas powers to fight both.

20. “The *Modern Review*, a Calcutta-based English-language publication” called it the “Brussels Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism and for National Independence” (Louro 2018, 19).

How and Why Do Colonialism and Imperialism Become Synonymous?

The question, therefore, is if the colonial and imperial were distinct and understood as such for most of modern history by those who both championed and challenged them, how did they become indistinguishable in contemporary scholarship? Building on the changes already underway described previously, I argue they are fully conflated after WWII, as the colonized peoples in Africa/Asia work toward decolonization and self-determination within a newly minted UN system.

UN Charter, Blue Water Thesis, Bandung Conference, and UN Resolution 1514

The creation of UN Article 1 (self-determination)²¹ and Articles 73 and 74 (“Declaration Regarding Non Self-Governing Territories” or NSGTs) create an international process through which those subject to imperial power could achieve national self-determination. The immediate question became who should be included in the category of NSGT? The “salt water thesis” was one proposed answer; it delimited colonized peoples to those with an ocean between themselves and their colonizers. While a longer history dating back to the nineteenth century can be found for a land/overseas distinction, the salt water thesis became a critical first step in conflating imperialism and colonialism within international law and practice. Importantly, for our purposes, this new definition of colonialism—*overseas* racialized domination—is very hard to distinguish from imperialism.

The second step in their conflation occurs in 1955, as the Bandung Conference with delegates from twenty-nine Asian and African states sought to advance decolonization and also championed “a definition of colonialism that took the salt-water theory as a main criterion [for] the main issue [which was] advancement . . . towards self-government and independence” (El-Ayoute 1971, 52). As Roy (1998) argues, anticolonialists in Africa and Asia believed the process would be quicker if “colonies located across the

21. After WWI, President Wilson (1918) in his Fourteen Points, argued for an international organization and ‘impartial adjustment of all colonial claims’ with the ‘the interests of the populations concerned’ given equal weight to imperial governments; leading not to decolonization but the mandate system. This can be seen as a precursor of self-determination after WWII.

‘salt water’ were able to gain independence without disrupting the territorial integrity of existing nation states”—meaning, in particular, settler colonial states like America (Roy:16).

In his speech on the opening day of the conference, host President Sukarno of Indonesia began by paying tribute to what he called the “League Against Imperialism and Colonialism” as the precursor to Bandung. He also underscored that colonialism is defined as overseas rule and anticolonialism the opposition to such rule when he claims: the “American War of Independence [was] the first successful *anti-colonial* war in history” (Chakrabarty 2005, 4814, emphasis added). This statement is, in part, a product of the geopolitics of the era as the American government switched from supporting the Dutch to Indonesians in their fight for independence after the “police actions” of 1948; thus Sukarno knew the emerging superpower of America had a vested and shared interest in the outcome of Bandung with respect to the Indonesians but also in light of the Chinese and Soviet governments.²²

The statement is still noteworthy, however, for what it says about the new meaning of colonialism and its implications for indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. While it is true the American Revolution involved settler colonialists violently overthrowing British imperial rule and thus—in a narrow Benthamite sense—might be called “anti-imperial” (rejection of overseas rule). But to describe it as the first *anticolonial* war in history is quite extraordinary. It erases indigenous peoples from colonialism altogether, despite the fact they were the very people Locke targeted in his original articulation of this ideology *in America*. Indeed, America as the model for anticolonialism demonstrates exactly why colonialism needs to be distinguished from imperialism. Championing settler states who gain independence from imperial powers without reference to indigenous peoples and the dispossession of their territories only deepens colonial power *within* America and only makes sense within a salt-water definition of colonialism.

While Bandung—understood through official channels—can be seen as a process of decolonization that reinforced state sovereignty, the international system, and settler colonial states, there are important alternative, subaltern

22. The Americans who had supported Dutch rule in Indonesia immediately after the war changed course after Dutch “police action” in 1948 brutalized Indonesians fighting for independence. “American policy changed drastically” in support of Sukarno as they pressured the Dutch to yield (McMahon 2020). For more on the geopolitics of Bandung, see Vitalis (2013).

schools of thought and scholars like Dipesh Chakrabarty²³ and Adom Getachew, among others, who provide a different historical narrative. Chakrabarty (2005) acknowledges some leading participants at Bandung engaged in an “uncritical emphasis on [catching up] with the west,” but others sought “decolonization . . . opposed to the territorial imagination of the nation state” in a world of “global, ‘deterritorialized’ identity” (4812).

Getachew (2019) likewise argues that many Black Atlantic thinkers understood that postwar “decolonization could not be limited to securing independence” and, instead, “began from the foundational role of New World slavery” (5) to address “conditions of unequal integration” and “international hierarchy that facilitated domination” and offered up a theory, instead, of “anticolonial worldmaking” and “international nondomination” (23). Such alternative visions challenged white supremacy as a foundational global phenomenon in the international system and intertwined forces of settler colonialism, imperialism, and slavery. Had these alternative visions been embraced, a different path would have opened up in global politics—away from state sovereignty and racial domination. Ultimately, however, the state system and salt-water thesis prevailed as the latter was adopted in UN Res. 1514 in 1960. A definition of colonialism as overseas domination is now formalized as international law—this is the third step in conflating imperialism and colonialism.

Finally, this new definition of colonialism as overseas domination also had an enormous impact on academia in the 1960s and ’70s, with scholars critical of colonial power coalescing around domination as the single most important characteristic of colonialism.²⁴ Horvath (1972) sums this up: “[It] seems generally, if not universally, agreed that colonialism is a form of

23. Chakrabarty’s analysis emerges out a school of ‘subaltern studies’ which he, Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak and others establish. Gramsci’s subaltern proletariat was replaced by agrarian peasants; while power has racialized and cultural dimensions. They sought to analyze history from the perspective of the masses in the global south and over time, gender, caste and/or religion were also integrated as they analyzed who can speak and for whom. I do not have the space to address this rich, complex, and evolving literature, but it was as a foundation for the alternative views on imperial power and decolonization I point to here.

24. Balandier (1966, 54) defines it as ‘domination imposed by a foreign minority, racially. . . on an indigenous population’ (54); Osterhammel (1997) as a ‘relationship of domination between an indigenous. . .majority . . .in pursuit of interests. . .defined in a distant metropolis.’ (16–17)

domination . . . control by individuals or groups over the territory and/or behavior of other individuals or groups” (47). In essence, *imperare*, the etymological root of imperialism is now the single defining feature of colonialism in international practice *and scholarship*.

Before I analyze the problems created by this new definition of colonialism and its conflation with imperialism, it is important to first recognize how key this definition was at this historical juncture, both substantively and strategically, for the majority of the globe’s population (as Partha Chatterjee puts it, “most of the world” was represented in Bandung). Colonialism understood as overseas racialized domination was not only an accurate description of how the peoples of Africa and Asia experienced Europe in the imperial era, but it provided political leverage to facilitate national liberation, via the international system, in the mid-twentieth century. It should also be noted that domination is central to how contemporary settler colonial and indigenous scholars define colonialism. Veracini (2010) comments: “Settler colonial phenomena is premised on . . . domination.” Coulthard (2014) argues a “settler-colonial relationship” is one “characterized by a particular form of domination . . . where power . . . has been structured into a . . . set of hierarchical social relations” (6–7).

To argue colonialism is different from imperialism, therefore, is not to deny domination was/is an important aspect of colonialism (despite settler and domestic colonialists’ claim they reject domination). Rather, the distinction is important to help identify the *particular* kind of power/domination animating colonialism and how it manifested itself in specific practices in colonial processes and institutions.

With this important caveat, I turn to outline four key problems of colonialism being defined as overseas domination and synonymous with imperialism:

1. Colonialism, understood through the salt water thesis, excludes
 - a) Settler colonies and indigenous peoples (Anaya 2004; Lightfoot 2016)
 - b) Domestic colonialism and those who were subject to it
2. The key principles of segregation, labor/waste land, and improvement that had long defined settler and domestic colonialism as ideologies disappear from anticolonial and postcolonial scholars’ analyses of colonial ideology and practice as well as theorizing about what constitutes decolonization.

3. The capacity to analyze the specific kind of power unleashed by colonialism, as distinct from imperial thought and practice, is circumscribed.
4. Colonialism, now defined primarily *as domination*, gains enormous rhetorical power that could be redeployed by all kinds of scholars/activists seeking a powerful negative term to describe a multitude of injustices. Decolonization simultaneously becomes a metaphor for resistance to all these different forms of domination, which moves the analysis away from *actual* historical colonial practices and those subject to them (Tuck and Yang 2012). This problem of colonialism as a metaphor largely detached from historical processes is best demonstrated by the “internal colonialism” scholarship, which we turn to now.

Internal Colonialism Scholarship: Colonialism as Metaphor for Domination

While colonialism—for contemporary indigenous, postcolonial, settler colonial, and domestic colonial scholars—was and is largely used to describe *actual* historical practices and processes, scholars of “internal colonialism,” like Hechter (1975), Habermas (1985), and Blauner (1969), use it as a powerful *metaphor* for domination of various kinds. They do so because they hope to capture the enormously negative rhetorical power of a word like colonialism in their condemnation of other forms of power. The use of the term in this way creates several problems—particularly for people(s) actually subject to colonialism historically.²⁵

The first problem with “internal colonialism” is that it is being used to describe so many kinds of injustices²⁶ (Hicks 2004; Hind 1984), leading some scholars to argue it is almost meaningless (Gonzalez 1974). The second problem with deploying colonialism as a metaphor for all forms of domination is that it marginalizes indigenous peoples from the center of scholarly analysis and/or makes them one of many groups in settler societies who were subject to domination. As Jodi Byrd notes: “The problems inherent within Hechter, Blauner, hooks and others who have tried to frame race as colonialism” is to obfuscate “ongoing processes of colonialism that continue to affect American Indians and other indigenous peoples . . . ‘internal colonialism’ is

25. For a more detailed analysis of four schools of internal colonialism scholarship and the limitations of this term in each case, see Arneil (2017, 6–14).

an empty referent . . . claimed by any marginalized group.” It turns “American Indians into a minority within a country of minorities” leading to the “*fait accompli* of the colonial project that disappears sovereignty, land rights and self-governance as American Indians are finally, if not quite fully, assimilated into the United States” (Byrd 2011, 43–45).

While this literature is problematic for the reasons described previously, the use of the term internal colonies/colonialism by African American scholars and activists (Carmichael and Hamilton [1967], Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr.) seems to be different in the key sense that it had *both* metaphorical and historical meanings. In *Black Power*, Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) explicitly say that they are using the word colonialism as a “metaphor” for current “political decisions made for them by the colonial masters” (6). At the same time, the subtitle of their book, *Politics of Liberation*, points to a historical commonality between African Americans and Africans in trans-Atlantic slavery—both are engaged in a struggle to emancipate themselves from white imperial/colonial domination.²⁷ As Adamson (2019) notes, “the internal colony foregrounded alliances with struggles for national liberation abroad” (343). Getachew (2019) also links the two since the Black Atlantic experience of slavery involved imperial power (capturing and transporting slaves) and colonial power (chattel labor used to cultivate land).

Colonial versus Imperial: Why the Distinction Matters

Having shown in the preceding analysis how the colonial and imperial differed historically, even as they intersected over time and eventually conflated completely after WWII, I conclude with an analysis of why the distinction still matters in theory (to analyze distinct threads of colonial and imperial in the history of political thought) and practice (to analyze the specific colonial power unleashed on those subject to it in settler and domestic colonial processes and institutions).

26. Hicks (2004, 3) lists 32 different countries where internal colonialism has been applied.

27. In 1928, a resolution on the “Negro Question in the United States” at the Third Comintern speaks to the oppression in the “Black Belt” as “semicolonial” and “worse than in a number of colonies.”

Colonialism versus Imperialism in the History of Political Thought

In the history of modern political thought, once we recognize colonialism is distinct from—but overlapping with—imperialism, and that it has both a domestic and foreign face, a more complex picture emerges as to how key thinkers embrace and/or reject various threads of colonial/imperial thought. John Locke defends settler colonies in explicit opposition to imperialism (conquest, natural racialized superiority, and claiming large swathes of land). Jeremy Bentham defends domestic colonies in *Pauper Management Improved*, in opposition to imperialism. He also opposes settler colonialism for most of his life but defends a “colonization proposal” in Australia (Bentham 2021) at the end of his life. Bentham is thus best described across his lifetime as an anti-imperialist but pro-domestic/settler colonialist (Arneil 2021).

J. S. Mill defends imperialism in India (Pitts 2005) and settler colonialism in Canada (Bell 2016) but utterly repudiates domestic colonialism: “The much vaunted ‘Home Colonization’ system of Belgium and Holland . . . plainly appears to be, what from general principles one might have predicted . . . a miserable failure” (Mill 1835, 2). Douglass (2000) defends certain kinds of domestic colonies for freed slaves but describes foreign colonies (Liberia) as “ultimate extermination” of African Americans (186). Alexis de Tocqueville defends imperialism in Algeria (Pitts 2000), settler colonialism in America (Dahl 2015), and domestic colonies (*colonies agricoles*) in France (de Beaumont and de Tocqueville 1833; Crossley 1991). Tolstoy and Kropotkin defend domestic and settler colonies for Doukhobors in Canada but reject imperialism. Each thinker combines colonialism (domestic and/or settler), imperialism, anti-imperialism, and/or anticolonialism in unique ways from the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century.

At the start of the twentieth century, the anti-imperialism of Lenin and Hobson helps to define the anticolonialism of national liberationists from the global south as they create the League Against Imperialism and for National Independence—demonstrating that the distinction between colonialism and imperialism was recognized even as these groups combined to fight both together. And leading figures in Asia (Nehru) and Africa (Fanon) view themselves as anticolonialist in the sense of expelling a specific foreign metropole who has ruled over racialized peoples in particular colonies from afar. Fanon and Coulthard both argue decolonization means rejecting the psycho-affective and material aspects of colonial power.

By distinguishing the colonial from the imperial, historians of political thought can trace and analyze multiple threads across time, as well as explain how colonialism—rooted in improvement—could be strongly embraced by so many liberal, socialist, and anarchist thinkers from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries even as they forcefully rejected imperialism. Tracing these evolving meanings helps us to also explain how twentieth-century leaders in Africa and Asia seeking to expel overseas powers came to view themselves as *anticolonialists* (inside a global system of imperialism).

Colonialism in Practice: Colonial Institutions and Productive Power

The distinction of colonialism from imperialism matters in practice too as we can identify the specific kind of power animating domestic and settler colonial processes and institutions. Colonialism—characterized by an internalized and productive power, seeks to *improve* people and land *from within*, overseen by colonial authorities living in close proximity through the *segregation* of “backward” people(s) from their own home/community/city and re-education and/or training in *agrarian labor*, so as to transform them into industrious and rational citizens. Despite colonialists’ claims that colonialism was more humane than imperialism, the power inherent in these processes led inexorably to abuse and genocidal policies in practice. To understand these profoundly negative outcomes in colonial processes and institutions in relation to the ideology that justified them, I will analyze how each colonial principle contributed in particular ways to colonial power in practice.

Agrarian Labour. For colonialists—whether domestic or settler—they claim both poverty and unemployment are caused by the failings of individuals, rooted in their customs (indigenous peoples) or habits/character (poor/disabled), rather than a product of larger structural forces (racism, ableism, colonialism, and/or capitalism). To address these problems, therefore, individuals must be segregated from their communities and break them free from their idleness by engaging in agrarian labor. For settler colonialists, indigenous peoples can also be removed from “waste” land (as defined by colonial authorities), allowing settlers to claim it their own private property via agrarian labor. Thomas Jefferson thus rooted his settler colonial Indian removal policies in Locke (Arneil 1996), thus posing—in practice—a stark choice to indigenous peoples. In a letter to the Cherokee in 1809, he asks them to either

“betake themselves to agriculture” or “remove across the Mississippi.”²⁸ Such policies, foundational to settler colonization, were fundamentally rooted in the ideological claim that indigenous people “fail” to labor on land and leave it waste.

The colonial defense of residential schools also relies on an ideological claim around labor as such institutions seek to transform “idle” indigenous children into industrious citizens. In 1920, Duncan Scott Campbell, superintendent of Indian education in Canada, argues “schools” should focus on “carpentry and farming” for boys and “housekeeping” for girls. The centrality of labor to such institutions is highlighted in chapter 14, “Student as Labourer: 1867–1939,” of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Final Report on Residential Schools* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). It provides evidence of how far “learning” was focused on agrarian and domestic labor. Domestic colonialists likewise argue the “bottom tenth” in Europe (idle poor, paupers, petty criminals) are to be segregated into colonies and their central activity become daily agrarian labor so to transform themselves into industrious citizens.

Improvement. Colonialists, in theory, argue that idle and/or irrational people should not be conquered (settler colonialism) or punished in workhouses, prisons, and/or asylums (domestic colonialism) but improved and transformed from within—via training and education. Improvement from within requires close oversight and supervision by colonial authorities in purpose-built colonies and/or colonial institutions. The first step to improvement is for those subject to colonialism to first recognize—within themselves—their own backwardness, facilitated by segregation and the right kind of “education.” The changes wrought in the name of improvement are thus deeply internalized. In a similar but distinct way, the mentally ill, disabled, and paupers of Europe were required to understand their lives of misery to be a product of their bad habits and poor character—daily labor and routinized training would transform (improve) them.

The most extreme version of improvement from within is, of course, the residential “school” that explicitly sought—in the name of their “improvement”—to destroy indigenous language, knowledge, spirituality, and culture. “Education” means those living within such “schools” must expunge their peoples’ ways of being and knowing to become improved—that is,

28. Jefferson, Written Message to the Cherokee Delegation, January 9, 1809, cited in McLoughlin, 575.

“civilized” as defined by colonial authorities. Indigenous children under colonialism were thus individual agents in these “schools” for extinguishing their own peoples’ collective identity, language, and culture. The implications in practice have been documented by survivors in the *TRC Report on Residential Schools in Canada* (2015).

Thus, an important distinction between domestic and settler colonialist institutions is while the former sought to improve the disabled/poor from within with all the attendant negative impacts, residential schools alone engaged in genocide. Settler colonialism is thus different not only in degree but in kind. But both domestic and settler colonial institutions were characterized by high levels of mental, physical, and sexual abuse, which can be traced, in part, to the principle of improvement. If the goal of improvement, as described previously, is to change bodies and minds *from within* as overseen by supervisors in close proximity to residents on a daily basis, this principle creates extremely fertile ground for staff to violate the physical and/or mental boundaries of those in their “care.” Abuse is also easier exactly because colonies house the most vulnerable of populations in society—disabled people, paupers, juvenile delinquents, and indigenous children.

Segregation. Segregating the backward from their own families and communities is necessary according to colonialists to begin the process of breaking them “free” from bad customs and/or habits. The adjective *residential* attached to “schools” speaks to this complete separation of children from their families and communities for the explicit purpose of destroying their ways of being and knowing. Architects of domestic colonies likewise created residential institutions in the countryside to segregate the mentally ill, disabled, and poor away from their homes. With respect to disabled people, domestic colonies are thus the first example of what would become a long-standing ableist belief in a wholesale policy of segregating the disabled into purpose-built institutions. First defended by Bentham (2010) in his proposal for pauper panopticons with fourteen categories of disability, domestic colonies would separate the disabled not only from society but also from the nondisabled paupers within his colonies.

Segregation is harmful in and of itself but it also compounds the likelihood of physical, mental, and sexual abuse in such institutions, as described previously, exactly because staff and/or superintendents knew those in their “care” were completely beyond any oversight by society and thus they could engage in abusive behavior with impunity (something Bentham identified in his

design of pauper panopticons and so built in the principle of surveillance of staff as well as residents; see Arneil 2021). Sexual predators and bullies would also likely be drawn to such institutions with guaranteed access to potential victims without consequences. It is not surprising, therefore, that two of the largest class-action lawsuits in Canada have been launched by survivors of indigenous residential “schools” and residents of what was once the provincial farm colony for the mentally disabled and ill in Ontario.

In the first case, the *TRC Report* (2015) documents the rampant sexual, physical, and emotional abuse in residential schools in detail along with a systematic process of cultural genocide. In the latter case regarding the Huronia Mental Health Center in Orillia (originally the provincial Farm Colony when it opened in 1922; Orillia Packet 1912, 1; Rizzo 2014), the lawsuit documents physical, mental, and sexual abuse (Arneil 2017; Rossiter and Clarkson 2013). Finally, Toth (2019) shows how abuse became part of the daily life at the original *colonie agricole* in France—Mettray—throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Ultimately, the three key principles of agrarian labor on waste land, improvement, and segregation, which constitute this central thread of colonialism I have been describing, was embraced by many liberals, socialists, and anarchists exactly because it is seen as more humane—even emancipatory. But in practice, these same principles led to extraordinarily negative implications. Distinguishing colonialism from imperialism is thus important to identify different threads in the history of political thought and analyze, in practice, the power animating colonial processes and institutions as inherent to the ideology itself and its key principles.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding this research, and several commentators and audiences who provided useful insights and feedback on it through years of revision. I particularly want to thank the Oxford University Political Theory Group where I presented it first, Clare Hall Cambridge where I began it, and the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study where I finished it, as well as the editors of *Political Theory*, the two anonymous reviewers who helped to sharpen the argument, and, finally, my colleague Nazmul Sultan who provided important and extensive feedback.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The author would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Clare Hall Cambridge and the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study for financial support.

ORCID iD

Barbara Arneil  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0426-1622>

References

- Adamson, Morgan. 2019. "Internal Colony as Political Perspective: Counterinsurgency, Extraction, and Anticolonial Legacies of '68 in the United States." *Cultural Politics* 15 (3): 343–57.
- Anaya, S. 2004. *Indigenous Peoples in International Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Armitage, David. 2012. "John Locke: Theorist of Empire?" In *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, edited by Sankar Muthu, 84–111. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arneil, Barbara. 1994. "Trade, Plantations and Property: John Locke and the Economic Defense of Colonialism." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55 (4): 591–609.
- . 1996. *John Locke and America: A Defense of English Colonialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2017. *Domestic Colonies: An Inward Turn to Colony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2021. "Jeremy Bentham: Pauperism, Colonialism and Imperialism." *American Political Science Review* 115 (4): 1147–58.
- Balandier, Georges. 1966. "The Colonial Situation: A Theoretical Approach." In *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*, edited by Immanuel Wallerstein, 34–61. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Bell, Duncan. 2013. "Ideologies of Empire." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, edited by Michael Freeden, Lyman Tower Sargent, and Marc Stears, 536–61. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2016. "John Stuart Mill on Colonies." In *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire*, edited by Duncan Bell, 211–36. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bentham, Jeremy. 2010. "Pauper Management Improved." In *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: Writings on the Poor Laws*, vol. 2, edited by Michael Quinn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2021. "Colonization Company Proposal." In *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: Panopticon versus New South Wales and other writings on Australia*, edited by Tim Causer and Philip Schofield, 401–435. London: University College London Press.

- Blauner, Robert. 1969. "Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt." *Social Problems* 16 (4): 393–408.
- Butt, Daniel. 2013. "Colonialism and Post-colonialism." In *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, edited by Hugh LaFollette, 892–98. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Byrd, Jodi. 2011. "Been to the Nation, Lord, but I couldn't stay There: American Indian Sovereignty, Cherokee Freedmen and the Incommensurability of the Internal." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 13 (1): 31–52.
- Carmichael, Stokely, and Charles Hamilton. 1967. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- . 2005. "Legacies of Bandung: Decolonization and the Politics of Culture." *Economic and Political Weekly* 40 (46): 4812–18.
- Coulthard, Glen. 2007. "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada." *Contemporary Political Theory* 6 (4): 437–60.
- . 2014. *Red Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Crossley, Ceri. 1991. "Using and Transforming the French Countryside: The 'Colonies Agricoles' (1820-1850)." *French Studies* 45 (1): 36–54.
- Dahl, Adam. 2015. "The Tocquevillian Moment: Settler Colonialism and the Democratic Social State." Paper presented at the Western Political Science Association Meetings, Las Vegas, NV, April.
- de Beaumont, Gustave, and Alexis de Tocqueville. 1833. *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and Its Application in France with an Appendix on Penal Colonies, and Also, Statistical Notes*. Philadelphia, PA: Carey, Lea & Blanchard.
- Douglass, Frederick. 2000. "Hon. Horace Greeley and the People of Color." In *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, edited by Frederick Douglass, 185–87. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press.
- El-Ayoute, Yassin. 1971. *The United Nations and Decolonization: The Role of Afro-Asia*. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus-Nijhoff.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1994. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Farr, James. 2009. "Locke, 'Some Americans', and the Discourse on 'Carolina'." *Locke Studies* 9: 17–96.
- Finley, M. I. 1976. "Colonies – An Attempt at a Typology." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*. 26: 167–88.
- Freedon, Michael. 2004. *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth Century Progressive Thought*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Getachew, Adom. 2019. *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Getachew, Adom, and Karuna Mantena. 2021. "Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory." *Critical Times* 4 (3): 359–98.

- Goldie, Mark. 2021. "Empire, Property and the New York Land Question." First Carlyle Lecture in series *John Locke and Empire*. Accessed January 19, 2021. <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/event/the-carlyle-lectures-2021-john-locke-and-empire>.
- Gonzalez, Gilbert. 1974. "IV Reviews: A Critique of the Internal Colony Model." *Latin American Perspectives* 1 (1): 154–61.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1985. *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Hechter, Michael. 1975. *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Hicks, Jack. 2004. "On the Application of Theories of 'Internal Colonialism' to Inuit Societies." Paper Presented at CPSA Conference, Winnipeg, Canada, June.
- Hind, Robert J. 1984. "The Internal Colonial Concept." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (3): 543–68.
- Hobson, John A. 1902. *Imperialism: A Study*. New York, NY: James Pott & Co.
- Horvath, Ronald. 1972. "A Definition of Colonialism." *Current Anthropology* 13 (1): 45–57.
- Ince, Onur Ulas. 2018. *Colonial Capitalism and the Dilemmas of Liberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kohn, Margaret. 2012. "Colonialism." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism/>.
- Kropotkin, Peter. 1898. "Some of the Resources of Canada." *The Nineteenth Century* 43 (253): 494–514.
- Kumar, Krishan. 2021. "Colony and Empire, Colonialism and Imperialism: A Meaningful Distinction?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63 (2): 280–309.
- Laidlaw, Zoe. 2022. "Peopling the Country by Unpeopling It." In *Jeremy Bentham and Australia: Convicts, Utility and Empire*, edited by Tim Causer, Margot Finn, and Philip Schofield, 248–272. London: UCL Press.
- Lenin, Vladimir. 1917. *Imperialism: The Last Stage of Capitalism*. London: Communist Party of Great Britain (published in English in 1926).
- . 1920. "Theses on the National and Colonial Questions." In *Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress of the Communist International*, vol. 1, 283–90. London: Pathfinder Press.
- Lightfoot, Sheryl. 2016. *Global Indigenous Politics: A Subtle Revolution*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Locke, John. 1975. *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- . 1988. *Two Treatises on Government*. Edited by Peter Laslett. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Louro, Michele. 2018. *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India and Interwar Internationalism*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

- Louro, Michele, Carolien Stolte, Heather Streets-Salter, and Sana Tannoury-Karam. 2020. "The League Against Imperialism." In *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives*, edited by Michele Louro, Carolien Stolte, Heather Streets-Salter, and Sana Tannoury-Karam, 17–51. Leiden: Leiden University Press.
- Mantena, Karuna. 2010. *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- . 2016. "Popular Sovereignty and Anti-Colonialism." In *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, edited by Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner, 297–313. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McMahon, Robert. 2020. "The US and Indonesia's Independence: History, Legacy and Lessons." *Strategic Review*. Jakarta: School of Government and Public Policy Indonesia, June 19.
- Mill, J. S. 1835. Response to Nassau William "Senior's Preface to the Foreign Communications Poor Law Report." *Globe and Traveller*, June 22, p. 2.
- Naoroji, Dadabhai. 1917 [1866–1915]. *Speeches and Writings of Dadabhai Naoroji*. Madras, India: G.A. Nathesen & Co.
- Orillia Packet*. 1912. "Farm Colony for the Feeble-Minded." May 15, p. 1.
- Osterhammel, Jürgen. 1997. *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. Translated by Shelly L. Frisch. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener.
- Pinheiro, Lucas. 2022. "A Factory Afield: Capitalism and Empire in John Locke's Political Economy." *Modern Intellectual History* 19 (1): 1–28.
- Pitts, Jennifer. 2000. "Empire and Democracy: Tocqueville and the Algeria Question." *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 8: 295–318.
- . 2005. *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- . 2010. "Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism." *Annual Review of Political Science* 13: 211–35.
- Prashad, Vijay. 2007. *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*. New York: The New Press.
- Ridell, John. 2020. "Origins of the Anti-Imperialist United Front: The Comintern and Asia, 1919-1925." In *Left Transnationalism: The Communist International and the National, Colonial and Racial Questions*, edited by Oleska Drachewych and Ian McKay, 99–124. Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queens University Press.
- Rizzo, Dennis. 2014. *A Brief History of Orillia*. Charleston, SC: The History Press.
- Rossiter, Kate, and Annalise Clarkson. 2013. "Opening Ontario's "Saddest Chapter": A Social History of Huronia Regional Centre." *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 2 (3): 1–30.
- Roy, Audrey. 1998. "Sovereignty and Decolonization: Realizing Indigenous Self-Determination at the United Nations and in Canada." MA thesis, Department of Indigenous Governance, University of Victoria, Victoria, Canada.
- Said, Edward. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Seeley, John Robert. 1883. *The Expansion of England*. Boston, MA: Roberts Brothers.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. 2011. "Colony." *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*. New School for Social Research, Issue 1. <http://www.politicalconcepts.org/issue1/colony/>.

- Sultan, Nazmul. 2020. "Self-Rule and the Problem of Peoplehood in Colonial India." *American Political Science Review* 114 (1): 81–94.
- . 2022. "On Colonialism: The Meaning and Politics of a Twentieth-Century Category." Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Conference, September, Montreal.
- Tolstoy, Leo. 1900. "A Letter to those Doukhobors who have Migrated to Canada." February 27.
- Toth, Stephen A. 2019. *A History of France's Most Venerated Carceral Institution*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the TRC*. Ottawa, Canada: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- Tuck, Eve, and Wayne Yang. 2012. "Decolonization is not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1 (1): 1–40.
- Turner, Jack. 2011. "John Locke, Christian Mission, and Colonial America." *Modern Intellectual History* 8 (2): 267–97.
- Veracini, Lorenzo. 2010. *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Vitalis, Robert. 2013. "The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah and Other Fables of Bandung." *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism and Development* 4 (2): 261–88.
- Wakefield, Edward. 1830. *A Statement of the Principles and Objects of a Proposed National Society for the Cure and Prevention of Pauperism, by Means of Systematic Colonization*. London: National Colonization Society Provisional Committee.
- Washington, Booker T. 1912. "The Rural Negro Community." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 40: 81–89.
- Wilson, Woodrow. 1918. "Fourteen Points." National Archives. Accessed April 2023. <https://www.theworldwar.org/learn/peace/fourteen-points>.
- Wolfe, Patrick. 2006. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (4): 387–409.

Author Biography

Barbara Arneil, professor in political science at UBC, FRSC, has expertise in identity politics and the history of political thought, with a focus on colonialism, gender, social capital, disability, and domestic colonies. Awards for her research include the David Easton Award from APSA, the C.B. MacPherson Prize from the CPSA, and the Harrison Prize from the UK Political Studies Association. Most recent publications include "Inorganic and Organic Citizenship," *Citizenship Studies* (2022), and "Jeremy Bentham: Pauperism, Colonialism and Imperialism," *APSR* (2021).