

# Domestic Colonies in Canada: Rethinking the Definition of Colony

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What is a colony? In the biological sciences, one speaks of ant or bee colonies, in medicine, bacterial colonies. Modern historians and political theorists generally define colonies as overseas locations where European states extended power over foreign peoples and lands via processes of domination, dispossession and assimilation, linked inextricably to empire. But colonies also exist for citizens *within* states—penal or medical quarantine colonies (leprosy or tuberculosis colonies, for example) that punish and/or contain those deemed to be a threat. Even today, one still hears references to artist or writers' colonies—rural retreats to which participants go voluntarily to escape city life and engage in creative labour with each other. In this article, I will analyze another kind of historical colony for citizens within states, namely, *domestic colonies*, using Canada as my case study.

Domestic colonies (entities within state borders explicitly called *colonies* by those who proposed them) were created first in Europe and then North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unlike imperial colonies, domestic colonies were created *within the borders of* states (rather than overseas) targeting *fellow citizens* (rather than foreigners) in order to solve virtually every social problem encountered within rapidly industrializing and urbanizing societies. Unlike penal or tuberculosis colonies, their primary aim was to “improve” rather than punish or contain, and unlike artist or writers' colonies, they were created for minority groups of fellow citizens based on class, race, disability and/or religious and political beliefs. There were three broad categories of domestic colonies based on who lived within them and the “problem” to be solved: labour colonies for the idle poor, farm colonies for the mentally ill and/or disabled and utopian colonies by and/or for political, religious and racial minorities.

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*Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique*

51:3 (September / septembre 2018) 497–519 doi:10.1017/S0008423917001469

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and/et la Société québécoise de science politique

If we return to our original question—*what is a colony*—in light of these many different kinds of colonies (biological, medical, political, artistic and domestic), the question becomes *what, if anything, do they share in common?* Perhaps the only characteristic that unites them all is segregation since, by definition, colonies are bounded collectivities of humans or organisms separated from the rest of a species, society and/or “metropole.” Bacterial, bee and ant colonies as well as the various human colonies exist as a distinct and bounded collectivity with specific social arrangements at some distance from the other members of the species or society, often linked, in human colonies, to a parent population, a mother city or metropole.

If we move from all colonies to *human* colonies, the second characteristic they share in common is members engaged in agrarian labour on “empty” land in order cultivate the soil. Thus, the etymological origins of Latin words *colonia* (agricultural settlement), *colonus* (farmer) and *colere* (cultivation) show how foundational agrarian labour is to the word colony. While largely overlooked in contemporary post-colonial understandings of colonialism and colonization, I argue agrarian labour remained absolutely central to a critically important thread of colonial thought and practice beginning in ancient Greece and Rome through John Locke’s early modern colonialism to twentieth-century domestic colonies. The third characteristic of human colonies, as articulated in the ideology of colonialism that sought to justify them, is improvement of people and land through labour.

Segregation, agrarian labour and improvement thus anchor the modern ideology of *colonialism*. Colonialism, first articulated in modern political theory in an embryonic form in John Locke’s seventeenth-century agrarian labour theory of property in America (Arneil, 1996), became foundational to the defense of domestic colonies two centuries later. Locke claims English settlers have the right to claim title over “empty” or “wast” land in America not because they conquered another people or occupied their territory, but because they enclosed and cultivated the soil, consistent with God’s will.<sup>1</sup> This theory of property rooted in agrarian labour contrasts sharply with previous theories of property founded in the principle of either occupation (favoured by the ancient Romans) or conquest (favoured by Catholic natural law theorists).

Indeed, Locke explicitly rejects conquest as the basis of colonial right over land, which he describes as a “strange doctrine” being so different from the accepted ways of the world.<sup>2</sup> For Locke, agrarian labour makes colonization ethical since it is not through might but industry consistent with God’s will that humans become industrious and cultivate the earth which, he argues, justifies the English settlers’ appropriation of land. At the same time, Locke argues that the economic benefits of colonization (against a very skeptical audience at home who generally saw colonization

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**Abstract.** What is a colony? In this article, I reconsider the meaning of colony in light of the existence of domestic colonies in Canada around the turn of the twentieth century. The two case studies examined are farm colonies for the mentally disabled and ill in Ontario and British Columbia and utopian colonies for Doukhobors in Saskatchewan. I show how both kinds of colonies are characterized by the same three principles found in Lockean settler colonialism: segregation, agrarian labour on uncultivated soil and improvement/cultivation of people and land. Defining “colony” in this way is theoretically interesting as it is different from the definition found in most dictionaries and post-colonial scholarship. There is also an inherent contradiction within domestic colonies as they both support state power over indigenous peoples, Doukhobors and the mentally ill and disabled but also challenge the principles of domination, individualism, private property and sovereignty upon which the Canadian settler state was founded.

**Résumé.** Qu'est-ce qu'une colonie? Je reprends, dans cet article, le sens donné à cette notion à la lumière des colonies intérieures existant au Canada vers le tournant du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les deux études de cas examinées portent sur des colonies agricoles pour des personnes ayant une déficience mentale et malades en Ontario et en Colombie-Britannique et des colonies utopiques pour des doukhobors en Saskatchewan. Je montre comment les deux types de colonies sont caractérisés par les mêmes trois principes que l'on retrouve dans le colonialisme lockéen: ségrégation, travail agraire sur des terres non cultivées et amélioration des sols. Il est théoriquement intéressant de définir ainsi la notion de « colonie », car elle diffère de la définition de la plupart des dictionnaires et de la littérature postcoloniale. Il y a aussi une contradiction inhérente entre les colonies intérieures qui, toutes deux, soutiennent la primauté du pouvoir de l'État sur les communautés autochtones, les doukhobors et les personnes ayant une déficience mentale et malades, mais qui contestent également les principes de domination, d'individualisme, de propriété privée et de souveraineté sur lesquels l'État colonial canadien a été fondé.

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in America as draining the wealth of England) are also rooted in agrarian labour, with the value of land increased by ten- or a hundred-fold and revenues created for colonial proprietors including Locke's patron, the Earl of Shaftesbury. Locke thus believed he had justified colonization in terms of both its ethical and economic benefits.

Locke's arguments are important because the same justifications (economic and ethical) will be used to defend *domestic* colonies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moving the “idle and irrational” (the unemployed or the mentally ill and disabled) into home colonies (within the borders of their own states) and engaging them primarily in the cultivation of empty soil, it was argued, will not only be good for the members of the colony itself but will produce revenues for the state to offset the costs of maintaining such populations (viewed increasingly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as burdens or drains on society).

Just as Locke had argued colonization was good for American “Indians” as, once separated from their “ways, modes and notions,” they could be broken free from their customary and idle ways to be transformed into industrious and productive “freemen” (and thus enjoy the same conveniences as the “more improved” English settler); domestic colonialists in

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries argued colonization was good for the idle poor, mentally ill and disabled of Europe who could also be broken free from their bad habits in segregated colonies and engaged in agrarian labour through which they too would become industrious and productive citizens while also producing revenues for the state or philanthropic organization to maintain such colonies. Thus both the economic and ethical justifications are repeatedly deployed by domestic colonialists to justify the colony model.

It is important to note that this definition of domestic colonialism, characterized by segregation, agrarian labour and improvement, is at odds with the definitions provided in contemporary dictionaries and post-colonial scholarship both of which tend to define colonization almost exclusively as domination over foreign peoples and lands. Thus, the Oxford English dictionary's definition is: "a) send[ing] settlers to (a place) and establish political control over it... b) settl[ing] among and establish control over (the indigenous people)." Similarly, the main scholars of contemporary post-colonialism (Edward Said, Albert Memmi, Georges Balandier, Jurgen Osterhammel and Ronald Horvath)<sup>3</sup> define colonies and colonization as *external* to Europe and engaged in *domination* over racialized others. More recently, even settler colonial scholars define colonization as domination by a foreign entity but the colonizer now rules from *within* the same territory. "Settler colonialism constitutes a circumstance where the colonizing effort is exercised from *within* the bounds of a settler colonizing political entity" (Veracini, 2010: 6).

There is one very good reason why colonization has been defined almost exclusively in terms of race, domination and foreign lands and peoples because, far and away, the most profound manifestation of colonial power in the modern era is that of European and settler states assimilating or dominating non-Western indigenous others and dispossessing them of their territory while exploiting their resources. I wish to acknowledge this central point at the outset, because while this article focuses on the largely overlooked historical existence of *domestic* colonies and their contradictory normative character, the shift in focus should not in any way diminish the enormity or profoundly negative nature of an imperial form of external colonization.

I would also argue, however, the words "colonialism" and "colonization," over time have moved away from describing actual historical processes within or outside of states and instead become metaphors for racial and ethnic domination. Thus, in addition to post-colonial scholars who define external colonization as domination by Europeans over indigenous peoples and lands, "internal colonialism" has been used to describe states domination of ethnic or racial minorities within their own borders. Jurgen Habermas (1985) uses internal colonialism as a metaphor for an insidious and dominating power within late modern capitalism, Michael Hechter

(1975) uses it to describe domination by England over the Celtic fringe in Britain, and Robert Blauner (1972) uses it to describe the American state's domination of African Americans. Thus the words "colonialism" and "colonization" are increasingly *not* used to describe the processes through which various kinds of colonies were created or justified but instead as metaphors for various profoundly negative forms of domination. And "decolonization" has simultaneously become a metaphor for resisting these various kinds of racialized domination. There is a problem with this use of the term, as Tuck and Yang argue in their article, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," namely, that it obscures and elides the concrete historical processes of colonization and decolonization: "Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools" (2012: 1).

In this article I argue, like Tuck and Yang, the focus ought to be on concrete historical processes of colonization and the ideologies of colonialism that justified them. But, guided by historical evidence, I incorporate domestic colonies into my analysis of colonialism and colonization; which creates a complicated picture of the practice of colonization and the normative meanings of colonialism and colonies. For example, if we return to our original list of colonies, the biological colony (ant or bee colonies) have a neutral normative connotation (simply a descriptive scientific term); most human colonies (imperial, penal, medical and settler colonies) have profoundly negative connotations. Other human colonies (artist and writers' colonies) have positive normative connotations.

In the case of domestic colonies, they have contradictory normative meanings—both positive and negative—depending on the colony and the justifications made in its defense. On the one hand, domestic colonies championed by progressive or radical thinkers to "improve" rather than punish minority populations in *explicit opposition* to institutions such as prisons, asylums or workhouses that dominated them can be seen as having some positive normative dimensions. In Europe, for example, in the century that precedes the introduction of domestic colonies in Canada, Alexis de Tocqueville, along with his co-author Gustave Beaumont (1833), explicitly rejected French overseas penal colonies as barbaric in his 1833 report to the French government on criminal justice and argues in favour of domestic *colonies agricoles*. He financed the first colony—the famous Mettray Colony—in 1840 that segregated juvenile delinquents from the city and engaged them in agrarian labour in the French countryside.

William Booth (1890), founder of the Salvation Army in Britain, likewise championed farm labour colonies for the idle poor in the 1890s in explicit opposition to prisons, workhouses and poor houses. In the Americas, Charles Bernstein proposed farm colonies (1920, 1921) for the mentally disabled in opposition to the constraints of asylums or barbarity

of sterilization, while Peter Kropotkin (1898b) defended the peaceful, collective labour of Doukhobor colonies in opposition to what he viewed as the immoral norms of society rooted in industrial capitalism, private property and militarism. In these examples, the colony has, for its defenders, a positive, progressive, even radical role to play in society.

On the other hand, domestic colonies also had profoundly negative normative dimensions. Eugenicists, like Walter Fernald (1893) in America and Frank Hodgins (1919) in Canada, defended permanent custodial care as necessary for repressing the reproduction of the disabled. Moreover, despite the lofty claims made for colonies by domestic colonialists, they often deteriorated over time into abusive institutions. Thus Mettray Colony became a place of terrible abuse (Toth, 2006). Likewise farm colonies became places where physical and sexual abuse was not uncommon. Perhaps most importantly, given the focus on Canada in this article, all domestic colonies established in the Americas required settler colonization and the dispossession of indigenous territory to exist at all. In all of these ways, domestic colonies also had negative normative dimensions.

### **Domestic Colonies in Canada: A Cacophony of Intersecting Colonialisms**

In what follows, I analyze case studies of domestic colonies in Canada on two levels: the *process* of domestic colonization through secondary historical literature on the colonies themselves and the *ideology* of domestic colonialism through the primary writings of the leading medical, political and social thinkers of the time who sought to justify them. These two levels of analyses (empirical reality and ideological justifications) allow us to answer our original questions: what are *domestic colonies* and what *normative meanings* are ascribed to them via the justifications advanced in their defense?

The two case studies of domestic colonies and colonialists are, first, the farm colonies for the mentally ill and disabled, championed by the leading Canadian psychiatrists of the period, such as Alder Blumer and T.J.W. Burgess (1905), and leading experts on mental disability, such as Helen MacMurchy (1920), Inspector of the Feeble Minded in Ontario and Frank Hodgins, Chair of the 1919 Ontario Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble Minded and the Canadian National Committee of Mental Hygiene, Canadian domestic colonialists rooted their defenses of farm colonies in the arguments of Charles Bernstein and Walter Fernald, American superintendents of farm colonies in Massachusetts and New York respectively. The second case study is utopian colonies for Doukhobors championed by Leo Tolstoy, Peter Kropotkin and the professor and chair of political economy at University of Toronto, James Mavor.

The domestic colonialists listed above, as shall be shown, repeatedly deploy the principles of segregation, agrarian labour and improvement as necessary to produce the economic benefits (save the state money) and ethical benefits (help those within them) of the “colony model” over alternative institutions or ways of life. It is important to understand that because these colonies were located *in Canada* rather than Europe, they were also embedded in *settler* colonialism. As such, Jodi Byrd’s idea of colonialism as “cacophony” provides a useful foundational framework.

In geographical localities of the Americas, where histories of settlers and arrivants map themselves into and on top of indigenous peoples, understanding colonialism as a cacophony of contradictorily hegemonic and horizontal struggles offers an alternative way of formulating and addressing dynamics that continue to affect peoples as they move and are made to move within empire. (2011: 53)

The “hegemonic and horizontal struggles” of “settlers and arrivants” — whether religious minorities like the Doukhobors who moved voluntarily into utopian colonies or the mentally disabled and ill who were “made to move” “on top of” indigenous peoples’ territories—create clashes in both the multiple *processes of colonization* and different *colonialisms and contrasting ideologies*.

Ultimately, the purposes of this article are threefold:

1. To recognize the multiple ways in which the word colony is used historically and analyze, more specifically, the manifestations of colonialism in Canada through domestic colonies.
2. To show that while a colony in Canada is generally understood to mean either an external colony of the British empire (in the case of pre-confederation) and/or a settler colony (in the case of post-Confederation Canada), there were also colonies created for certain kinds of citizens within the processes of settler colonization in Canada.
3. To understand domestic colonies as cacophonous is to analyze them as sites of clashing processes of colonization as various groups of citizens, experts, the state and (underpinning it all) indigenous peoples engage in struggles defined by territory, race, disability, religious belief and state sovereignty; *and* as sites of clashing ideologies of colonialisms: domestic colonialism (the ideology deployed to defend the benefits of utopian and farm colonies using the same principles of segregation, agrarian labour and improvement of both people and land to justify them); settler colonialism, since such colonies required the prior dispossession of indigenous peoples to exist at all (in a way that domestic colonies in Europe did not); and, in the case of Doukhobor colonies, radical colonialism. Inherent within these clashing ideologies are the

contradictory normative meanings of the domestic colony, since the utopian colony could be, simultaneously, a vehicle through which the foundational norms of society including capitalism, private property and/or militarism was challenged (a progressive or positive normative meaning) and a vehicle for dispossession (a negative normative meaning). The farm colony, also rooted in settler colonization, could be a tool for eugenics (a regressive normative ideology and permanent custodial care) or for anti-eugenicists (progressive alternative to sterilization and return to society for the disabled).

### **Case Study 1: Farm Colonies for the Mentally Disabled and Ill in Ontario and BC**

The question of the “feeble-minded” and what to do with them was at the top of the policy agenda in both Europe and North America at the end of nineteenth century, due in large part to the introduction of universal primary education (Thomson, 1998). Hastings Hart, of the Russell Sage Foundation in America, argued at the end of the nineteenth century that, “the most acute and pressing social problem at the present time is the problem of the feeble-minded” (Noll, 1995:1). One solution, first introduced in the 1870s in Germany, was the farm colony for those deemed to be “irrational.” It grew rapidly in popularity in both Europe and North America, so by May 26, 1899, the *New York Times* quotes Dr. G Alder Blumer at the American Medico-Psychological Association (precursor of American Psychiatric Association) saying, “It is uncommon... to find anywhere in the United States *or Canada* at this time a hospital for the insane that does not possess... farms and gardens to which the patient sallies forth each day as a contented laborer to his toil” (“Farm Work,” 1899).

The two leading defenders of farm colonies for the mentally disabled in America were Charles Bernstein in New York and Walter Fernald in Massachusetts. For both men, the colony model required segregation of the mentally ill or disabled in a rural location to engage in agrarian labour to “improve” and transform themselves into productive members of society as far as possible and produce agricultural goods for the colony itself and sell for revenues. In other words, both used the three principles of domestic colonialism to make the case for the economic and ethical benefits of the colony. While Fernald was (at least earlier in his career) a eugenicist and argued for permanent custodial care, Bernstein was firmly opposed to permanent custodial care and sterilization, arguing colonies ought to be temporary locations in order to teach farming skills for re-entry into society. Fernald, by the end of his career, was convinced by Bernstein’s model and he too adopted the labour and parole system in his farm colony. Fernald and Bernstein are important to Canadian domestic



colonialists because their arguments were explicitly and repeatedly used to justify colonies in Canada.

The farm colony model grew in popularity in Canada in the first three decades of the twentieth century for the mentally ill and disabled; such colonies were established in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. In Ontario, and as early as 1879, John Langmuir, the Ontario Inspector of Insane Asylums wrote in his annual report: “[To] cultivate in that class of patients a taste for work...is of infinitely greater importance, than any other portion of Asylum work and supervision” (20). A large plot of “empty” land was required. “It is clear therefore from the standpoint of public economy, and leaving out the question of the beneficial and healthful results accruing to the insane from land cultivation, that as large an area of land should be attached to asylums as can be profitably worked” (21). Geoffrey Reaume argues the emphasis on agrarian labour was motivated by an “Anglo-American idea of it is an appeal to both ethical and economic benefits (2006: 70).”

One of the first Canadians to champion the colony for the mentally ill was T.J.W. Burgess, Canadian President of the America-Medico Psychological Association, the precursor of the American Psychiatric Association. In 1905, during his address, “The Insane in Canada,” he proposed farm colonies because they offered the best mode of care for therapeutic reasons but also because revenues could be raised. “In colonies... if a sufficiency of land be secured, floriculture, fruit-growing, and market-gardening, all of which are among the best forms of occupation ...[and] can be made sources of profit” (113) .

In 1907, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario created its first commission to produce a census of and report on the feeble-minded in Ontario and make recommendations as to their care. The report begins by distinguishing classifications of mental disability based on “degrees of reason,” idiots to imbeciles to the feeble-minded. Segregation from society was deemed to be necessary and even inherent in the terms used to describe them. Thus, on idiots, the report notes, “the word ‘idiot’ is derived from the Greek and denotes one who has no share in ordinary public affairs [because] certain brain cells are lacking. No amount of training can raise them into reasoning beings” (Ontario Legislative Assembly, 1907: 2). Imbeciles, on the other hand, may be taught a limited amount and the “feeble-minded” can be taught to engage in domestic labour and farm work. The report repeatedly quotes Fernald as it speaks to the ethical (therapeutic) and economic (revenues) benefits of colonization.

When we consider the Institutions for the permanent care of the feeble-minded, the first, and we might also say, the greatest State Institution in America is the Massachusetts School of the Feeble-Minded...of which Dr. Walter Fernald is the Superintendent. Dr. Fernald is known all over

the world as one of the foremost authorities on the feeble minded, and renown brought to the Institution by the great success of his methods in teaching and training them. It has about 700 inmates and there is a farm colony... a tract of land three miles long by one mile wide affords ... their own improvement and training, but often with an economic result. (62)

The report thus emphasizes the economic and ethical benefits to Canadian society, “every consideration of humanity, of wise statesmanship, of good public policy, combine to sanction and enforce the cause...there is nothing which, done rightly, will help so much to diminish the drain on the pockets of the taxpayers as the wise and prudent care of these unfortunates [in farm colonies]” (18). It concludes the 4000 “idiots, imbeciles and feeble-minded persons” in Ontario have only one institute (the Orillia Asylum) but it should be expanded to introduce a farm colony. “Institution care is the only way to deal with the Feeble-Minded. Farm Colonies with Industrial and Agricultural Training and Employment are the most successful” (63).

Dr. Helen MacMurchy, Inspector of the Feeble-Minded in Ontario from 1906 to 1916, agreed with the report’s findings and visited the Orillia Asylum for Idiots in 1912 to publicly announce the creation of a provincial “farm colony for the feeble-minded” (1912: 1) In 1920, MacMurchy published a book, *The Almosts: A Study of the Feeble-minded*, in which she defends the farm colony in ethical terms as a form of “freedom” when compared to traditional asylums which constrain patients: “Farm colony life for mentally defective persons is intended to give them the maximum of freedom and development” via agrarian labour (1920: 129).

Farmland was purchased to create the farm colony in Orillia in 1911 but work on it did not start until after WWI: “It was not until 1922 that anything resembling the proposed colony plan was established [at] Orillia. Known as the farm colony... the colony...was 660 acres in extent, with 318 acres under cultivation.” The economic benefits were viewed as advantageous from the beginning: “[a] very important aspect of the economy of Orillia...the farm boys lived segregated from the main population in Cottage ‘F,’ also called Farm Colony House” (Park, 1995: 67, 70). The economic revenue from the farm colony was not insignificant. By 1940, “there were 96 head of cattle, with a dairy milk production of 2,500 pounds, 131 swines and 13 sows and 1000 chicks” (Wheatley, 2017). Thus, once again, the farm colony is justified in terms of both its economic (less cost to the state) and ethical benefits (improves the individuals).

In December 1916, at hearings held by the Toronto Board of Education on the problem of the feeble-minded, “one of the largest deputations that ever appeared before a body in the city council chamber” recommended farm colonies for Toronto (the group led by Dr. C.J. Clarke, president of the Toronto Branch of the Ontario Association of the Care of the Feeble-Minded also included Dr. MacMurchy, Dr. Conboy and eighty

representatives of the Toronto branch of the Provincial Association for the Care of the Feeble-Minded). The *Toronto World* newspaper reports: "Mental defectiveness in all of its various phases, including...the urgent necessity of arresting its progress by the establishment of farm colonies was the subject of speeches delivered" (Mental Defectives, 1916). Using the principles of both colonialism ("educate the defectives") and eugenics ("segregate the sexes"), the Board of Education ultimately "endorsed a farm colony plan of looking after the feeble-minded children of Toronto...near the city's industrial farms" ("Plan Farm Colony," 1916), but this plan was also put on hold, like Orillia, due to WWI.

In 1919, there was a second Royal Commission in Ontario, *Royal Commission Report on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded in Ontario*, chaired by Frank Hodgins. Hodgins took up the argument for farm colonies in his report stating farm colonies should "be revived [but] in a somewhat different form" (1919). If one compares the title of the 1907 report, "Care of the Feeble-Minded in Canada" to the 1919 Report "Care and Control of the *Mentally Defective* and Feeble-Minded in Canada," (my emphasis) the word "control" refers to an increased emphasis on reproductive control over women's bodies; and the word "defective" speaks to the idea of "degeneracy." In other words, Hodgins was far more influenced by eugenics than the authors of the previous report. Eugenics shapes not only the title but the substance of the recommendations. Instead of "improvement" and care of the feeble minded, Hodgins' report emphasizes control in farm colonies over the criminal propensities of the mentally defective and permanent segregation of disabled women in particular. It is ironic that Ontario moves towards a more eugenicist, punitive and segregationist form of colonization in 1919, just as Hodgins' main inspiration, Walter Fernald, is going in the opposite direction, rejecting permanent segregation under Bernstein's influence and supporting the idea of re-entry into society. In Quebec there were also recommendations to implement farm colonies for the mentally disabled and people with epilepsy. As late as 1936, one of Canada's most famous neurologists, Dr. Wilder Penfield "urged...a farm colony be established" by the provincial government in Quebec for "epileptics" like the one in Ontario ("Farm for Epileptics," 1936).

Farm colonies were also proposed in the Prairies. The Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene conducted a survey of "mental abnormality" in Manitoba in 1918 ("Manitoba Survey," 1919) and Saskatchewan in 1920 ("Mental Hygiene," 1922), publishing their findings in the *Journal of Mental Hygiene*. At the conclusion of the eighty-page article on Saskatchewan, the recommendation was to introduce farm colonies explicitly using Bernstein as the model for a colony where "colonization of defectives has been carried on with great success" (382). Quoting Bernstein at great length, the report defends colonies using

ethical and economic arguments of “rehabilitation” rather than permanent custodial care: “From now on, we should devote our energies toward enlargement along the lines of colonization, to rehabilitate as far as possible the patients that come to us and to return their services to the state.” The emphasis was labour on empty land, using “various parcels of state-owned land and on abandoned or undeveloped farms” (384; on farm colonies in Manitoba, see also Hicks, 2008).

In British Columbia, farm colonies were established in the nineteenth century while it was still a British colony and after it became a province of Canada. The intersection of domestic and settler colonialism is discussed by Roman and colleagues who note how, in the case of farm colonies for the mentally ill and disabled in Victoria and Coquitlam, the intersection of different kinds of colonial processes are generally overlooked in the literature. “Processes of medical colonization involve multiple and interrelated forms of colonial and medical rules—both the institutional confinement of the so-called ‘medically unfit’ and their confinement on stolen land... *that they have rarely been analyzed [as such] is quite stunning*” (2009: 19, emphasis added).

In 1878, the Public Hospital for the Insane was opened in New Westminster and in his annual report of 1883, the provincial medical officer argues for a farm colony: “There are about four acres of ground immediately in front...which ought to be fenced in and brought under cultivation. This would ... have a most beneficial effect on a large portion of the patients... to have them a portion of the time employed in cultivating vegetables” (quoted in Roman et al., 2009). In 1905, the farm colony was created and grew so rapidly that “by the second decade of the twentieth century [it was] the largest colony in Canada... designed to accommodate 560 patients...on a tract of 1000 acres suitable for diversified farming purposes” (Park, 1995: 253). The hospital and its attached farm colony in one form or another remained a key feature of the mental health system in BC until its closure in 1984. A small portion of this land continues to house the BC Forensic Psychiatric Hospital and the remainder of the land, reflecting its domestic colonial history, is now known as Colony Farm Regional Park.

The intersection between settler and domestic colonization which began at this farm colony’s inception continues to the present day as the Forensic Psychiatric Hospital located on the unceded traditional territory of the Kwikwetlem people who have “for more than a century opposed having a mental hospital on...its territorial land” (Dhillon and Bailey, 2012: S1). Like the Victoria lunatic asylum, this “farm colony” established on indigenous territory was a space of dual containment of disabled and indigenous peoples deliberately located at some distance from the white metropolis of Vancouver. In an article published in *The Globe and Mail* in December 2012, it is noted that while the Colony Farm engaged patients in agrarian labour for therapeutic reasons and provided food for the

Riverview Hospital for the Insane until 1983, it was a constant problem for the Kwikwetlem people from its inception until now. “For more than 80 years, the Kwikwetlem First Nation people have lived within walking distance of the Forensic Psychiatric Hospital at Colony Farm...Chief Kwikwetlem William—the man for whom the suburban community of Coquitlam is named knew firsthand the perils of living near a hospital for the mentally ill [as he]...was attacked by a pitchfork-wielding patient at Colony Farm during the 1930s” (Dhillon and Bailey, 2012: S1).

Thus, in Canada, farm colonies for the mentally ill and disabled were defended by leading medical experts as the best form of treatment for the first half of the twentieth century. Domestic colonialists used the ideology of domestic colonialism (rooted in the three principles of segregation, engagement in agrarian labour and improvement) to justify the colony model which would improve rather than simply contain the “irrational,” and transform them into “rational and industrious” citizens through agrarian labour. While domestic colonialists were liberal and progressive and thus championed colonies in explicit opposition to what they viewed as the less humane institutions like asylums and/or sterilization, some also viewed the colony as a vehicle for serving eugenicist ends through segregation. But while other domestic colonialists genuinely believed they were proposing a progressive alternative to the inhuman practices of constraints in asylums and the mutilation of sterilization, the reality is that over time, patients were often abused in these institutions. I would argue that such abuse is not coincidental but inherent in the ideology of colonialism itself which provides fertile theoretical ground for such abuse to occur over time.

First, the principle of “improvement” from *within* (where the patient must recognize they are “defective” and learn to become productive of their own accord) leads inexorably to the erasing of physical and mental boundaries of patients as superintendents and their staff seek to improve the colonized from within, meaning how they think “inside” their heads and how they behave. As such, the ideology of colonialism, as I define it, carries an insidious form of internalized power for the colonized. In its most profoundly negative form, this is manifested in the residential school system with indigenous children made to change from within by rejecting their own customs and language as backward, a process which begins with segregation from their own people and territory. The colonialism underpinning residential schools was thus a more profound form of abuse than farm colonies because it involved *genocide*, an attempt to extinguish indigenous peoples as *peoples*, whereas farm colonies sought to “improve” *individuals*. But both kinds of institutions held in common a tendency toward the physical and sexual abuse of those living within them.

Second, the principle of segregation facilitates abuse as superintendents and staff knew they could do so with impunity both due to the vulnerability of the populations (children in residential schools or the mentally ill

and disabled in farm colonies) and because there was little to no oversight with colonies located at some distance from the rest of society.

The extent of abuse in both farm colonies and residential schools has been documented in great detail in recent years often as the result of law suits launched by former residents. The Orillia Farm Colony and Asylum for Idiots later renamed the Huronia Regional Centre was subject to a \$1 billion lawsuit by former residents based on the documented abuse they suffered while living there; the Ontario provincial government settled this lawsuit with former residents. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Residential Schools, also the result of a lawsuit by survivors, provided evidence of the enormous amount of abuse, including not only physical and sexual abuse but cultural genocide.

### **Case Study 2: Utopian Domestic Colonies for Doukhobors**

Utopian colonies for religious minorities were the products of both domestic and settler colonialism. Indeed, the settler colonization of the prairies is in large measure a patchwork of various ethnically or religiously based utopian colonies interwoven in hybrid forms to constitute what is now the heartland of Canada: Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. While the colonization of the Canadian prairies was the initially the result of British and French traders and settlers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, by the end of the nineteenth century, immigration was increasingly made up of persecuted European religious minorities, including Jewish, Mennonite, Hutterite and Doukhobor settlers, who negotiated their arrival to Canada *not as individual settlers* but in bounded and segregated agrarian colonies in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. The Jewish Colonization Association established farm colonies across all three provinces; Hutterite colonies were established largely in Alberta and Manitoba, Mennonite colonies or “reserves” were established in Manitoba and Doukhobor colonies in Saskatchewan. While any one of these religious minorities could be a case study of the intersection between domestic and settler colonization, Doukhobor colonies are the most interesting because they represent, perhaps, the most radical form of colonialism (with the colony seen as a vehicle to challenge foundational norms of the wider Canadian society). Thus, the leading anarchist thinkers of the time, Leo Tolstoy and Peter Kropotkin, were their main defenders.

The history of the Doukhobors is a long and complicated one but by the second half of the nineteenth century, Nicholas II of Russia, having tried to conscript them into the military on repeated occasions and failing, forced them into internal exile. As staunch pacifists, the Doukhobors decided they would be better off leaving Russia and settling elsewhere; the Canadian prairies became the strongest possibility for

resettlement. In 1897, Kropotkin, a champion of the Doukhobors, travelled from Toronto to the Pacific coast recording his impressions in an article, "Some of the Resources of Canada," published in a London magazine, *The Nineteenth Century* (1898a), in which he championed the principles of domestic colonialism including in particular agrarian labour and segregation. With respect to agrarian labour, "Kropotkin was greatly impressed by the agricultural abundance throughout the Canadian Northwest, and especially by the experimental farms in the area" (Avrich, 1980: 6). Kropotkin also noted in earlier correspondence that every member of a "colony... works hard...[engaged in] reasoned, intensive gardening to grow all sorts of vegetables...guided by the experience of real gardeners" (1893:14).

He visited Mennonite colonies in Canada and saw them as a model not only because of the collective engagement in agrarian labour but because segregation from the rest of society allowed them to maintain a radically different way of life: "It is extremely interesting to see these communities holding their own, surrounded as they are by a very different civilization...It is a remarkable fact that amidst that capitalist civilization some twenty thousand men should continue to live, and to thrive, under a system of partial communism and passive resistance to the State" (Kropotkin, 1898c: 505). "The Mennonites... refuse to take part in any functions of the State and especially in military service. Tolstoy's name is, consequently, a subject of deep reverence among them. They also never have anything to do with justice or law... receive no subsidy from the State, and themselves keep their schools" (503). Agrarian labour and segregation were key to Kropotkin's colonial vision (Carmichael, 2013, Woodcock and Avakumovic, 1968; Yerbury, 1984).

On his return to Russia, Kropotkin along with Leo Tolstoy enlisted socialist James Mavor, professor of political economy at the University of Toronto and a leading proponent of labour colonies in Scotland for the unemployed poor (Mavor, 1893; Mavor et al., 1892) to be the liaison between the Doukhobors and the Canadian state. On August 31, 1898, Kropotkin wrote to Mavor asking him whether the Canadian government would provide land for Doukhobor colonies based on three conditions: "1. No obligation of military service; 2. Full independence in their inner organization; 3. Land in a block; they cannot live in isolated farms." Kropotkin concluded, "Can you obtain that from Canadian government?" (1898a).

Mavor contacted Clifford Sifton (Minister of the Interior from 1896 to 1905) to negotiate the Doukhobors' settlement in Saskatchewan. The first two conditions were met without trouble, at least initially, but the owning of land collectively was much more difficult to reconcile with the 1872 *Dominion Lands Act* that required land be held as individual parcels. Sifton devised a plan in which Doukhobors agreed to file for individual

quarter section lots but would not live on them as individuals, as stipulated in the act. The exact details of how this would work, along with the fact that the *Dominion Lands Act* also required applicants to swear allegiance to the Crown, were never fully resolved, a fact that came back to haunt both sides (Yerbury, 1984). The Canadian state signed the agreement but assumed the Doukhobors would ultimately give up their collective way of life and assimilate into Canadian society as individual property owners and citizens over time.

The most significant source of financing for the Doukhobors to settle in colonies in Canada came from Tolstoy who donated \$17,000 to the cause, using the royalties of his novel *Resurrection*. (Mayes, 1999: 41). The Canadian state set aside 400 thousand acres and on January 4, 1899, Sergey Tolstoy, the eldest son of Leo Tolstoy escorted 2300 Doukhobors to Saskatchewan. By the turn of the twentieth century, 7000 Doukhobors had immigrated to Saskatchewan (Tarasoff, 2006: 2) to live in one of two colonies (the North Colony and South Colony) or in a third colony near Prince Albert. Agrarian labour was central to both the Doukhobors and the Canadian state. "Sifton was eager to have the Doukhobors populate the West because of their accomplishments as agriculturalists" (Carmichael, 2013: 5).

While these colonies are examples of segregated colonies of citizens (albeit brand new ones) rooted in agrarian labour and hence domestic colonies, they are also settler colonies as well. The land upon which the original colonies were founded in Saskatchewan was the subject of two treaty negotiations (Treaty 4 in 1874 which includes twenty First Nations and Treaty 6 in 1876 which includes fifty First Nations). The British Crown and later the Canadian state claimed they had extinguished indigenous title and had full sovereignty through these treaties but indigenous peoples understood them to be shared land use agreements based on reciprocity and peaceful coexistence. Thus, the indigenous peoples living on these territories argue that they never "relinquished their right to nationhood, their inherent right to determine their own destinies, nor did they allow any foreign government to govern them" (Treaty Texts, 1966). Such treaties, to the extent they are used to claim extinguishment of title and the right to dispossess the indigenous peoples of their lands are manifestations of settler colonialism on the part of the Canadian state.

Moreover, within these treaties are Lockean colonial references to agrarian labour that is to "empty" land that should be put to "better use," to encouraging "idle Indians" to "improve" the soil and providing farming implements for this purpose. Thus, in Treaty 6, "It is further agreed between Her Majesty and the said Indians, that ... any Band of the said Indians who are now cultivating the soil, or who shall hereafter commence to cultivate the land...[will receive] four hoes for every family actually cultivating...[and] two spades...one plough...harrow...two axes...[for every three families]... *All the aforesaid articles to given*



*once and for all for the encouragement of the practice of agriculture among the Indians*" (emphasis added). Likewise, one of the eight conditions in Treaty 4 refers to: "presents of agricultural implements, cattle, grain...proportioned to the number of families in the Band actually engaged in farming." The agrarian based ideology of colonialism is thus present in justifying both the dispossession of indigenous territory and emphasis on "improvement" of indigenous peoples and lands in the language of the treaties themselves. These two treaties negotiated in the 1870s and the underlying agrarian labour-based colonialism were used by the Canadian state to claim a right to unilaterally set aside land for colonies in the 1900s for Doukhobors who were, after all, "sturdy agriculturalists."

Beyond the treaties, the Canadian state was deeply committed to the Lockean idea of "improvement" of indigenous peoples via agrarian labour as manifested in both legislation and policy. At the end of the nineteenth century, the federal government adopted a "series of policies designed to encourage Indians, especially those of the western interior, to adopt agriculture" (Miller, 2000:269). Beginning in the 1880s, the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) sent "farm instructors to the prairie west" in order to teach indigenous people "how to farm" (Bednasek, 2009: 64–65). As Sarah Carter has argued, under the leadership of Hayter Reed, DIA's deputy superintendent general, an aggressive policy of "peasant farming," "private property" and "individualism" on reserves was introduced. "The peasant farming policy emerged during an era when the stated priorities of the DIA were to dismantle what they called the 'tribal' or 'communist' system and to promote 'individualism'...one way to undermine the tribal system was to subdivide reserves into separate farms" (Carter, 1989: 30). Reed himself states at the time: "The policy of destroying the tribal or communist system is assailed in every way possible, and every effort made to implant a spirit of individual responsibility instead" (30). Thus, the Canadian state's antipathy to communist or collective ownership meant it ultimately sought to undermine the relationship to the land of both indigenous peoples and Doukhobor people.

Within a few years of settling in Saskatchewan, an internal disagreement emerged within the Doukhobor colonies as to whether to continue to cultivate and own their land collectively or adopt individual title (with pressure being applied by the Canadian state to move toward the latter). This debate led to Leo Tolstoy's famous letter to the Doukhobors in 1900 in which he reminded them of the centrality of collective property and cultivation to their religion and way of life: "The will of God is expressed completely in the commandment to love. To accumulate private property and to retain it separately from others means to act contrary to the will of God and His commandment" (Tolstoy, 1900). Thus, at the very heart of the Doukhobor colony and its spiritual redemptive promise for improvement was collective ownership and cultivation of land as required by God's will. Thus, unlike Locke, who had

argued God willed private property based on individual labour, Tolstoy and the original Doukhobors believed God's will was for communally held and cultivated land.

This debate over private property and cultivation came to a head in 1905 as a hardline Minister of the Interior, Frank Oliver, replaced Clifford Sifton and the Canadian state insisted Doukhobors must swear allegiance to the Crown and own and cultivate land in individual parcels (breaking the original promise made to Tolstoy and Kropotkin). The Department of the Interior went further under Oliver's leadership to embrace an aggressively assimilationist model articulated in an internal government document. "Doukhobors will need a constant watching until schools and contact with other settlers will transform them and make them think in the same way as an ordinary man does" (Yerbury, 1984: 47).

Thus for both indigenous peoples and Doukhobors, the Canadian state sought to assimilate them into settler society and transform them into full "citizens" by forcing them to give up their "customary ways," including communism and collective cultivation in order to adopt private property, individualism and dominion of the state over their lives and lands. The state became the enemy to both and was resisted. In turn, the response to such resistance in the case of the Doukhobors was for the BC government to invoke, again, the domestic colonial principles of segregation and "improvement" to justify removal of Doukhobor children from their homes, break them free from their customs and "educate" them away from their parents in boarding schools. This policy of apprehension, segregation and abuse of Doukhobors echoes the experience of some mentally disabled Canadians in farm colonies and (in a different way) residential schools as children in all three cases were segregated and "improved" through "education" and training in agrarian labour to become "rational" and industrious citizens rather than custom bound and "backward" individuals.

While there were some similarities, boarding schools for Doukhobors were fundamentally different from the residential school for indigenous children. Not only were they in place for a much shorter time and involved a fraction of the individuals who went to residential schools, the residential school infused the Canadian state as a whole and involved the *genocide* of indigenous peoples *as peoples* as well as their relationship to community and territory. The Doukhobors, on the other hand, came to Canada as settlers taking over land already occupied by indigenous peoples.

## Conclusion

I began this article with the question: What is a colony and what normative meaning should be ascribed to it? Building upon both imperial (pre-

confederation) and settler (post-confederation Canada) understandings of colonization, my analysis of domestic colonies creates a more complicated and comprehensive understanding of the history of both the processes of colonization and the ideology of colonialism used to justify them in Canada. At the heart of *domestic* colonies, in both practice and theory, was agrarian labour. Rooted etymologically in the Latin word *colonia* but traceable through the early modern colonialism of Locke, agrarian labour anchored various aspects of domestic and settler colonization and colonialism, from the *farm* colonies for the mentally disabled to the “good agriculturalists” (Doukhobors) that Clifford Sifton sought to bring from Russia to “settle” empty land in the Prairies to the inclusion of farming implements and agrarian labour in Treaties 4 and 6 to Kropotkin’s defense of collective rural farming as key to the Doukhobor colony.

Combining domestic colonies with imperial and settler colonies in our understanding of Canadian colonization is best understood through Jodi Byrd’s idea of cacophony. At the level of practice, cacophony is underpinned by the prior dispossession of indigenous peoples but manifested in the clashes between eugenicist and non-eugenicist proponents of the farm colony, between defenders of provincial farm colonies and indigenous peoples in Coquitlam BC, between Doukhobors and the governments of Canada and BC over collective ownership and allegiance to the state, with Doukhobor communities as some broke rank and endorsed private property while others remained true to their principles and were subject to state apprehension of their children. Such clashes on the ground and in practice between communities, experts, the state and indigenous peoples create a cacophony of “hegemonic and horizontal struggles” within and between settlers and arrivants moving and being made to move on top of indigenous territory.

The cacophony, however, also occurs at the level of ideology within the clashing normative claims of domestic, radical and settler colonialism. Domestic colonialism in Canada could be either a progressive and/or regressive force in relation to the mentally disabled and ill. For example, domestic colonialism was regressive when Fernald’s *eugenicist* principles were deployed to prevent reproduction via permanent custodial care (the 1919 Ontario Royal Commission) but was progressive when Bernstein’s *anti-eugenicist* principles were deployed to defend colony care in explicit opposition to sterilization or the constraints of traditional asylums (“Mental Hygiene,” 1922).

Despite lofty claims to a better form of therapy, however, the reality was that farm colonies often deteriorated into abuse over time. This is not a matter of a good ideology wrongly implemented. It was colonialism’s commitment to improvement from within and segregation of the colony from society outside which together created fertile ideological ground for physical and sexual abuse to occur even if the original proponents did

not intend it to happen in this way. To the extent that farm colonies require members to improve from within, an insidious set of power relations are created as superintendents or staff members believe they can violate boundaries in the name of improvement of their patients and the segregation from the rest of society gave abusers the space to act with impunity since their actions were beyond any oversight.

Colonialists who justified Doukhobor colonies were also engaged in normative contradictions or clashes. While Kropotkin and Tolstoy saw the colony as the vehicle through which to create a morally superior life for its members and to implement a radical philosophy in opposition to capitalism, militarism and individualism, the colony was also a vehicle for settlement and dispossession. Thus, the contradiction of the Doukhobor colony is in the fact that it simultaneously served the objectives of the settler state even as it challenged the very Lockean principles of private property and state sovereignty upon which that state was founded.

Thus, the cacophony of domestic colonies in Canada exists at two levels; at the level of domestic colonization, such colonies were produced through a variety of horizontal and vertical struggles between indigenous peoples and settler states, colonies and indigenous peoples, colonies and the wider society, and among members of colonies themselves. At the level of the ideology of colonialism, domestic colonies were the sites ultimately of the intersection of both progressive and regressive ideologies and different kinds of colonialism (settler, domestic and radical colonialism). Ultimately, it is this cacophony in both the theory and practice of domestic colonies that produces the normatively complicated and contradictory but also comprehensive understanding of “colonies” in Canada.

## Endnotes

- 1 “God gave the World to Men in Common...but 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 Labour* was to be his Title to it” (Locke, 1988 II: 475 emphasis added).
- 2 This is not to say that Locke’s opposition to conquest in theory led to a less oppressive form of power on the ground as experienced by indigenous peoples. Indeed, Locke’s form of colonialism led eventually to policies of both “removal” since the land was not being used properly, according to Locke’s formulation, and assimilation, since the thrust behind his form of colonialism is “improvement” from within. The point is simply that Locke’s colonialism, like the later domestic forms of colonialism, opposed domination and conquest in the name of labour and education, leading to a particular kind of power being exercised more insidious in nature, because colonialists did not seek to dominate from without as imperialists might do, but to change from within (“improve”). This kind of power in the ideology of colonialism leads to residential schools and the removal of those deemed to be “idle” from their own land.
- 3 On the “external” nature of colonization, Said sees it as “implanting of settlements on a *distant territory*” (1994: 9). In terms of domination, Balandier defines colonization as “domination imposed by a foreign minority... on an indigenous population” (1966

:54). Osterhammel asserts it as a “relationship of domination between an indigenous... majority and a minority of foreign invaders...in pursuit of interests...defined in a distant metropolis” (1997: 16–17) and Ronald Horvath says “it seems generally, if not universally, agreed that colonialism is a form of domination —the control by individuals or groups over the territory and/or behavior of other individuals or groups” (1972: 47).

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