Review

Domestic colonies: The turn inward to colony

Barbara Arneil
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In this wide-ranging and pioneering volume, Barbara Arneil provides the first major history and theorisation of 'domestic colonies'. Claiming that colonial and postcolonial scholarship conflates colonialism with imperialism and focuses almost exclusively on external colonies, she corrects this picture by surveying the vast network of domestic colonies that existed across Europe and North America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and examining its ideological and philosophical underpinnings. An established scholar of Locke and colonialism (1996), she mobilises her previous work to link her view of the ubiquity of domestic colonies to Locke's economic principles, chiefly his labour theory of acquisition that granted the right to 'empty land' to the 'industrious and rational', paving the way for European colonisation of external peoples. Crucially, however, Arneil claims that internal, domestic colonisation operated on the same Lockean principles, allowing the colonisation of both land and minds via an ostensibly benevolent paternalistic liberalism. Importantly, the justification for the idea of domestic colonisation is both economic and ethical. Whereas previous studies emphasise the ethical and idealist justifications, Arneil brings a much-needed focus on the economic justification, demonstrating how colonisers explicitly appealed to the profitability of colonies over conventional carceral institutions.

According to Arneil, research on colonies has previously been organised in an isolated fashion, based on specific groups of subjects: the idle poor, the disabled, the mentally ill, and racialised/ethno-religious minorities (p. 151). By establishing historical continuities between the underlying colonisation governing these groups (p. 112), she is able to draw more general conclusions about what she terms a 'transnational colonial network' (pp. 240–248) that transcends each of the subject populations. The book shows that the same organising logic structures these groups' domination, rooted in three key components of domestic colonisation: segregation, agrarian labour, and a commitment to the improvement of land and people.

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Arneil analyses three types of colonies. First, farm colonies primarily destined for the outcasts of urban society – the idle poor and vagrant, in both Europe and North America. Second, labour colonies for the mentally ill and disabled – and Arneil offers a comparison between Europe and North America. Third, utopian colonies of freely consenting members seeking to enact a particular political ideal, be it African-American segregationism (championed by Booker T. Washington), socialism (Robert Owen), or anarchism (Peter Kropotkin and Leo Tolstoy). All three share the characteristics of segregation, agrarian labour, and an ideal of improvement of land and people. Thus, Arneil brings all types of domestic colonies, irrespective of their constituency, into a 'single cross-comparative frame' (p. 171) that sees these institutions primarily as *colonies* rather than the manifestation of isolated proposals for different 'problem' populations. Domestic farm and labour colonies were often set up as an explicit rejection of the domination and coercion involved in punitive domestic institutions: embracing liberal paternalism, the aim was to get into the heads and minds of subjects and change their 'defective' ways. Utopian colonies, on the other hand, championed autonomy and collectivity, as Arneil shows in a fascinating and earnest history of the Doukhobors in Canada, but relied on dispossessing First Nations of their land.

The first constitutive feature of domestic colonies is segregating the target subjects from the general population. Colonies opt for the countryside to avoid the corrupting influence of increasingly urbanised society and such problems as alcoholism, vagrancy, corruption, and crime. Segregation, however, also expands the dominion of authorities over subjects, thereby facilitating impunity in their deployment of cruelty. Yet most colonies were at least conceived of as benevolent institutions, providing an alternative to the oppressive aspects of prisons and asylums. Indeed, the improvement of individuals was a second central *raison d'être* of domestic colonies. Because prisons and asylums chiefly repressed and controlled inmates, they tended to destroy rather than rehabilitate. Domestic colonies, on the other hand, sought to facilitate the mental and physical well-being of their subjects. Third, the central role of agrarian labour improved the land, in line with the Lockean paradigm. Agrarian labour constituted the economic cornerstone of domestic colonies. Whilst carceral institutions were a net drain on state finances, colonies were devised as self-sustaining, even profitable. Because all subjects were involved in intensive agricultural labour, there was little reliance on outside society. These three components taken together thus formed the basis for domestic colonies.

This stands in contrast to the dominant Foucauldian interpretation of punishment as carceral and ideational, eschewing attention to the economic (p. 157). Arneil contributes important critical insights into Foucault scholarship by challenging his revered claim that Mettray marks the beginning of the carceral system. Arneil convincingly shows that Mettray was chiefly a colony, not a carceral institution, and that the three features defining an internal colony were all present. This shows,

she argues, the limits of the Foucauldian insistence on punishment and power to the detriment of the economic and ideological role of segregating institutions. Indeed, 'Foucault's analysis fails to recognize the importance of the economic benefits of colonization' (p. 157). Arneil takes on another explanation for the prevalence of colonies, eugenics, and argues that, although influential in the development of some colonies, it 'falls far short of providing an adequate explanation' (p. 171) for the ubiquity of domestic colonies. However, Arneil stresses that a full turn away from the ethical and towards the economic – namely, seeing colonies purely as a pretext for economic exploitation – is also flawed (p. 167). What is needed is a nuanced understanding of the elements and forces that undergird domestic colonies, including the varied forms of utopian colonies motivated by anarchist, socialist, and African-American interests, which were largely driven by a desire to escape the exploitation and domination within mainstream society, as well as its carceral institutions.

Domestic colonialism stands in contrast to settler colonialism, yet often overlaps with it. Thus, all the domestic colonies set up in North America relied on settler colonialism, i.e. the dispossession and removal of indigenous populations, including the case of utopian African-American colonies. In contrast, this was not the case in European domestic colonies. Here, settler colonialism did not feature, thus avoiding one of the major problems with the North American domestic colonies. Arneil is not seeking to destabilise or minimise the role of settler colonialism in the history of European expansionism. Rather, she provides an important corrective to the conventional narrative that colonialism is, by definition, external, coercive, and carceral. Although domestic colonies were not free from elements of oppression, paternalism, and violence for subjects within them, the bulk of injustice surely fell on the many indigenous communities obliterated in the process of establishing this transnational colonial network.

The volume must be commended for stretching well beyond the norm in terms of its scope, sophistication, and nuance, contributing to a bourgeoning field of literature that challenges the benevolent status of liberal and Enlightenment thought (Buck-Morss, 2009; Losurdo, 2014). Yet one of the key strengths of this book, ambitiously rooting colonialism in a material and economical basis, occasionally becomes its weakness as the analysis stops short of overcoming the idealism Arneil sceptically turns against. For instance, the author is content with simply stating that one paradigm (Wakefield's systematic colonization) of domestic colonisation won out over two others (pauper immigration and home colonization) (p. 55) without explaining the underlying reasons why. She also falls short in tackling the forces behind certain colonies' failure (Owen's colonies in Britain) (p. 194). These are, to this reviewer, missed opportunities to advance the materialist elements of analysis. Employing tools from economic history – such as longitudinal data and statistics – could have anchored the argument more firmly. These points notwithstanding, this is an exemplary case of what high-quality contemporary political theory can do:

paying acute attention to the history of real people and systems of domination, and embracing a critical materialist perspective, Arneil succeeds in evincing the fault lines within both critical and liberal literatures.

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