The Internal Colonial Concept

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The use of internal colonial theories to examine racial developments within the United States of America had become almost fashionable by the late 1960s. A decade later, a study of the political economy of Wales described the internal colonial approach which it criticized as a "new variant of a time-worn model."1 Amongst historians, however, the internal colonial concept does not appear to be as familiar as it is to other social scientists. This article is addressed to historians who do not subscribe unreservedly to Alfred Cobban’s belief that sociologists are their natural enemies, and amongst whom some might still be considering the implications of Fernand Braudel’s contention that a "general history always requires an overall model, good or bad, against which events can be interpreted. ‘No theory, no history.’"2 The purpose here is to indicate some uses and characteristics of theories that the internal colonial concept has promoted, to comment briefly about some of the methodological issues which these theories present, and to suggest some benefits that the concept might have for certain types of social and historical enquiry.

Theories, models, and sometimes mere assumptions that emanate from the internal colonial concept are diverse. They have been used in relation to developments within Israel, Pakistan, South Africa, Sudan,3 and Thailand, and within American and European states too. The study of different phenomena within such contrasting societies, by scholars trained in distinctive ways, and whose respective disciplines embrace contending schools of analysis, has contributed to the formulation of diverse internal colonial theses for the examination of these societies. In one instance, internal colonialism is seen as the "peculiar socialism without the peasant," a socialism in which an

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“urban-centred power elite” in Russia transformed the “whole peasantry into a legally and factually discriminated [against] class” after 1917. “Stalin’s forced collectivization was thus Trotskyism applied within a framework of internal colonialism.”⁴ Another interpretation maintains that “ethnic solidarity among any objectively-defined set of individuals is principally due to the existence of a hierarchical cultural division of labor that promotes reactive group formation. This kind of division of labor is typically found in regions that have developed as internal colonies.”⁵ In that study, a theory of internal colonialism is selected for its analytical utility in order to explain the “persistence of a separate ethnic identity in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, during a century of rapid change” after 1850.⁶ One interpretation refers to the South African government’s “conception of separate development” as “domestic colonialism”;⁷ another regards internal colonialism as “primate city parasitism”;⁸ and another contends that Chicanos were “relegated to a permanent secondary status best characterized as internal colonialism.”⁹

In an early manifestation of the internal colonial theory, Lenin depicts the “migration of small industrialists and handicraftsmen from the central, long-settled and economically advanced” regions of Tsarist Russia to the steppes as a “manifestation of the colonization of the outer regions.” The steppes were thus colonies of European Russia. In his analysis, the “development of industry in central Russia and the development of commercial farming in the outer regions” are “inseparably connected.”¹⁰ According to communists in Turin in the 1920s, the “bourgeoisie of the North” had “subjected southern Italy and the Islands and reduced them to the status of exploited colonies.”¹¹

A later study maintains that South Africa is unique in that it embodies “within a single nation state a relationship characteristic of the external relationships between imperialist states and their colonies.” It regards the manner in which capitalist and various precapitalist modes of production have been permitted to react as the basis of internal colonialism in South Africa. Their interaction modified the relationship between wages and the cost of

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¹⁰ Vladimir I. Lenin, The Development of Capitalism in Russia (Moscow: Progress, 1956), 269–70, 363.
reproducing labour in favour of capitalists. In this thesis, the policies of segregation and then apartheid are seen as a response to the needs of capitalism at different stages of its development. This interpretation moves the focus of emphasis from the country’s racial policies. It argues that the capitalist sector of the economy benefited from the means of subsistence generated in the noncapitalist sectors, and it emphasizes the importance of the reserves or areas in this respect, in so far as they allowed the capitalist sector to avoid the cost of a portion of the necessary means of subsistence that would otherwise have had to be paid by way of indirect wages. This in turn increased the rate at which the surplus value of labour accrued to capitalists.

The propensity of capitalist accumulation and development to erode the noncapitalist economies upon which the rate of accumulation rests was qualified by capitalism’s countervailing tendency to strive to conserve the relationship, and with it the noncapitalist economies, although in a restructured form. Chronic poverty in the black South African rural economy, which stemmed from the effects of excessive population pressure upon fixed land areas, was aggravated by low capital investment and backward agrarian techniques. The consequences of this poverty were intensified by the extreme urban poverty among black South Africans caused partly by the capitalists’ failure to accept responsibility for indirect wages. The cumulative effects of this situation brought black South Africans to mount wide-ranging attacks upon the country’s political institutions and its socioeconomic arrangements in the 1940s and 1950s. Thus the change from segregation to apartheid is seen as the endeavour of the capitalist state to maintain by different means its supply of cheap migrant labour in the face of increasing opposition from the sources of supply. 12 This thesis maintains that specific ‘‘modes of political domination which assume a racial or ethnic and, therefore, a colonial rather than a class form have to be analysed in terms of the specific relations of economic exploitation.’’ 13

The evolution of the USSR has received an internal colonial interpretation in a reconnaissance of ‘‘the greatest moral issue in Soviet history, Stalinism.’’ In this thesis, internal colonialism is the ‘‘use of state power by one section of society . . . to impose unfavourable rates of exchange upon another.’’ The decisive social divisions are considered to be ideological, and those which turned upon an urban-rural nexus. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) did not regard the bulk of Russian society as ‘‘part of the same moral

community." Consequently, the party considered that the "principle of reciprocity" was inapplicable to it, and this permitted the CPSU to pursue "a deliberate strategy of exploitation—e.g., 'primitive socialist accumulation' or unequal exchange." This interpretation links together terror, property-transfer, personal dictatorship, and bureaucratic growth, and concentrates upon the first two of these phenomena. An "urban-centred power elite" mobilized its state power and "set out to dominate a largely rural society to which [the elite] related as an alien colonial power." Stalinism was embodied in one wing of the CPSU which sought to saddle the nation with a system of internal colonialism." This "internal colonial thesis concerning Stalinism avoids the mythology of a Marxism which had speciously held that the alternative was socialism or barbarism." It links "state socialism with the capitalism it had promised to transcend," and it sees the "peasants as the Soviets' Indians, and the Soviet countryside as a continental reservation."  

In the 1930s, the internal colonial image "was used to characterize relations between the northern and southern parts of the United States." More recently, however, this imagery has become identified with enquiries into the experience of specific racial or ethnic minorities. One corpus of writing maintains that the "Federal Government's policies towards Native Americans conform to a clearly colonial pattern, and that these policies are strongly related to Indian underdevelopment today." For instance, the highly adaptive, innovative, and, ceteris paribus, successful Cherokee Indians were unable to prevent the "legitimised destruction of their Nation." The consequences of the "relationship between the Cherokees and the United States," which one study regards as "one of unequal powers—of colonized and colonizer," included the reduction of a tribe with immense, demonstrated potential to the position of the "most impoverished minority in America."  

Elsewhere in the United States, individuals such as Eldridge Cleaver consider themselves as "stolen people held in a colonial status on stolen land," and thus "any analysis which does not acknowledge the colonial status of black people cannot hope to deal with the real problem." The black ghettos represent the "consequence of the imposition of external power and the institutionalization of powerlessness. In this respect, they are in fact social, political, educational, and above all—economic colonies." While administration of the ghettos by outsiders is also depicted as an essential feature of conventional colonialism, other aspects of the experience of black people are seen to differ from the classic colonial pattern. Within the country, they constitute a minority, they are less autonomous, they are more dispersed, and

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the "group culture and social structure of the colonized... is less developed."^{17}

Such manifestations of black people’s protest as the urban riots, the cultural developments amongst them, and their attempts to control their ghettos have been interpreted in some quarters as reactions to a colonized status. Moreover, there has been some erosion of previously held assumptions. The attainment of legal equality by the mid-1960s had more limited consequences than had been anticipated. Research undermined the conviction that black people would eventually emulate the upward social mobility of other ethnic immigrant groups. Analyses of their situation which presumed that black people were a subclass, especially exploited and increasingly dispensable in an automating society, failed to explain adequately the strength of racial antipathies in the country.

The thesis that relations between white and black people in America are essentially those of colonizer and colonized contends that all of the former acquire, or believe that they acquire, some privileges and advantages from the relationship. However, it does not claim that the relationship developed by methods that were identical to those of conventional colonialism. For instance, the lengthy period during which the slave trade and slavery existed, and the allegedly deliberate mixture of slaves from different tribes and regions to facilitate white control, constituted a cultural attack upon the languages, customs, and traditions of black people in America of a severity not experienced by indigenous people in African colonies. The context in which domestic colonialism functions is seen to differ too. Unlike their counterparts in colonial Africa, the American black community has no indigenous institutions, with the possible exception of its religious organizations, and no general autonomous economy. Because that community is engulfed by the wider structure of society, by its occupations, its educational system and so on, there exists amongst American black people a movement for integration as well as one for autonomy.

Theories that emanated from the internal colonial concept became more diverse and more clearly formulated during the 1960s. They gained wider currency, and were applied to certain developments within various other American countries too. The nature of these countries’ independence movements, the perpetuation of developments that had their roots in the colonial experience, and the character of these countries’ subsequent evolution produced types of social relationships that contributed to the emergence of such theories. In these analyses, the metropole-colony relationship allegedly has

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close parallels with relationships that have developed within some countries. These similarities, which are discernible in the forms of assertion of certain groups or races over others of different cultural or ethnic backgrounds within a specific country, brought internal colonial theories into use for the examination of several other Amerindian communities. Pablo González Casanova, for instance, who may have been the first to use the term internal colonialism in this context, claims that the exploitation of Indians in certain Latin American countries continued with the ‘same characteristics’ after independence.

In some countries, the pattern of historical development helps to give the concept an apparent validity, especially when heterogeneous ethnic groups live apart from each other. However, one phase of the evolution of relationships within a region that includes part of Guatemala and part of Mexico, in which Indians and Ladinos with their respective cultures, value systems, and societies are now interspersed, has also been depicted as a form of internal colonialism. Basic features of the colonial experience for Indian society in that region were ‘ethnic discrimination, political dependence, social inferiority, residential segregation, economic subjection, and juridical incapacity.’ Political independence, in practice, did not ameliorate the Indians’ position. Paternalistic legislation in the colonial period effectively confirmed and consolidated the assumed inferiority of Indians upon which that legislation was based. Thus when independence was gained, and legal equality proclaimed, the Indians were already placed in a position inferior to that of the rest of the population. Subsequently, internal struggles and economic vicissitudes during the first part of the nineteenth century rendered an improvement in Indian social position and economic condition impracticable. At the same time, the gradual extension of private ownership of land began to dispossess Indians of their communal lands and to oblige them to become wage-labourers.

Later in the century, the acceleration of these developments, which stemmed from the ideology of economic liberalism and the expansion of the capitalist economy, ‘once again transformed the quality of ethnic relationships between Indians and Ladinos’ and produced ‘a second form of colonialism, which we might call internal colonialism. Indians of traditional communities found themselves again in the role of a colonized people: they lost their lands, were forced to work for the ‘strangers,’ were integrated against their will [in]to a new monetary economy, and fell under new forms of political domination. This time, colonial society was national society itself, which progressively extended its control over its own territory.’ In this


analysis, the continuation of these developments is considered to have changed relations between Ladinos and Indians into class relationships.\textsuperscript{20}

In Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru, the political and economic policies of Europeanized mestizos, who tend to congregate in the lowlands, prevail over the disadvantaged Indians, who live separately in the Andean highlands. These highlands are depicted as the colony, the lowlands as the metropole. One interpretation merely asserts that within “some independent nations, certain groups of people have experienced domination by others, a condition . . . often referred to as internal colonialism.”

In Peru, for instance, racial differentiation is not as marked as that which exists in some other countries to which a theory of internal colonialism has been applied. The terms mestizo and Indian have lost most of their earlier racial connotations, and an intermediate group, the cholo, whose values and lifestyles differ from those of Indians and mestizos, has developed. Nevertheless, endeavours to improve the social and economic opportunities of Indians offer advantages only to those who are prepared to adjust to the mestizo culture at the expense of their own. Acculturation, it is asserted, “must be examined as an aspect of internal colonialism, conditioned by a pattern of dominant-submissive relationships that originated with the conquest of the Indians’ Inca ancestors and has endured since the time of the Spanish conquistadores.” As a group, the mestizos allegedly do not intentionally exploit Indians for their own profit. However, the government which they control has “foisted the mestizo social structure upon the Indian, and its actions have been patronizing and paternalistic in view of the Indians’ lack of participation in policy-making.” The government’s attempts to preserve aspects of Indian culture such as art and music have been “pallid in comparison to its systematic attempts to divest the Indian of his language and life style.”

For instance, a major function of schools for Indians, over which the Indians have no control, is the promotion of a sense of Peruvian nationality as determined by proponents of mestizaje, “an ideology of spiritual and cultural amalgamation of Spanish and Indian traditions.”\textsuperscript{21}

In Colombia, the “structural conditions” within society and the economy, and the relationships between a “relatively small dominant group” and a “large subjected mass composed of various groups with unarticulated interests,” brought some scholars to conclude that an orthodox Marxist concept of class is inappropriate for that country’s analysis. This assessment led one study to prefer to utilize a theory of internal colonialism in which the dominant and subjected groups are “not necessarily of different racial origin.”


depicts Colombia’s “social structure as one which is designed to provide for internal colonialism.” 22

A study in internal colonialism has maintained that the social condition of the Israeli Arabs is analogous to that of Amerindians, and to that of black people in South Africa. Through a system of political domination used initially by the colonial power (under the mandate of the League of Nations), the Israeli Jews subject the country’s Arab population to various political controls, and treat it as culturally distinct. Israeli Arabs are excluded from certain sociopolitical positions and activities, they experience other discriminatory policies, their land is exposed to appropriation, and they form the largest component of the lowest socioeconomic sections of Israeli society. 23

A theory of internal colonialism which draws its theoretical inspiration from the work of Robert Blauner has been used to examine the growth of the Bangladesh movement and the relationships between the constituent parts of Pakistan after 1947. It maintains that if the defining quality of colonialism is “the relationship of domination and subjection between two groups of differing cultures (and this appears to be so) then one can properly speak of colonialism within a country.” The study concludes that East Pakistan’s relationship to West Pakistan was similar to that of a colony to its metropole. Pakistan’s two regions were geographically, ethnically, and culturally distinct. There were, moreover, gross inequalities and economic and political disparities that operated to the disadvantage of East Pakistan. In addition, and “just as important,” the inhabitants of this latter region experienced an increase of cultural domination, which, if it had become established, would have given credibility “to the ‘natural superiority’ of the colonizer.” 24

Theories of internal colonialism, which emerged initially and sporadically in connexion with analyses of developments within a few European countries, gained new characteristics, wider currency, and greater sophistication in their application to countries that had secured independence from imperial powers. Since the mid-1970s, and partly because of the influence of Michael Hechter’s work, internal colonial theories have been applied to some other European states. According to Hechter, the “uneven pattern of development termed internal colonialism . . . developed in the first industrial society,” and survived the “rise and fall of the most extensive overseas colonial empire.” In his analysis, the dominant (core) and peripheral groups have distinct geographical bases within the British Isles, and each is considered to possess a

group consciousness. In addition, individuals of the "core culture are expected to dominate high prestige roles in the social structure of the peripheral regions, as is the situation in overseas colonies." In this analysis, internal colonialism is the process by which the "political incorporation of culturally distinct groups by the core" occurred, and it is clearly "distinguished from internal colonization, or the settlement of previously unoccupied territories within state borders." In its examination of the processes by which political, economic, religious, cultural, and technological movements, either singly or in some combination, are transmitted from one community, or section of society, to another, this theory of internal colonialism allegedly contrasts with diffusionist analyses. Although both interpretations rest upon assertions about the subjective state of mind of individuals, this internal colonial theory predicts that regional inequalities will persist or increase while diffusionists tend to anticipate their removal. Hechter recognizes that the precise form and degree of internal colonialism in Latin America differs from that within the British Isles. The Amerindians suffer greater deprivation of civil and political liberties, and are "far more destitute in relation to the ruling mestizos, than are the Celts in relation to the English," perhaps because they constitute an internal colony at the periphery of the world system, while the Celts constitute one at its heart.25

Hechter's theory of internal colonialism was found "useful for analysing regional variations in Finland,"26 and appropriate for the classification of Brittany as an internal colony of France. Large numbers of comparatively privileged Frenchmen have imposed their policies and values upon the Breton population and, in the process, have reinforced the "phenomenon of coinciding systems of ethnic and class stratification"27 which is a central feature of this version of internal colonialism. Hechter's theory, however, was considered inappropriate for the Italian experience, for which a network of personal relationships, an association of elites in the core with those in the periphery, allegedly supplies a better explanation of the social mechanisms in operation.28 Despite Transylvania's unequivocally colonial status within the Austro-Hungarian empire, a "chaotic image of multiple, hierarchically organized and overlapping cultural divisions of labor"29 expose a range of deficiencies in Hechter's analysis of internal colonialism when tested in that environment.

25 Hechter, Internal Colonialism, 10, 13, 18, 32 n. 2, 166, 344, 348, 350.
28 Alberto Palloni, "Internal Colonialism or Clientelistic Politics? The Case of Southern Italy," Ethnic and Racial Studies, 2:3 (July 1979), 375–76.
29 Katherine Verdery, "Internal Colonialism in Austria-Hungary," Ethnic and Racial Studies, 2:3 (July 1979), 393.
Theories of internal colonialism derive from analogies. In theses based upon them, the colonizing and colonized sections of society live in the same country. This approach usually excludes that feature of traditional views of colonization which assumes geographical separation, and also that feature which rests upon the premise that an entire population has imposed its authority upon an extraterritorial society or group of communities. The theories normally include such characteristics of conventional colonialism as political subjection, economic exploitation, cultural domination, and racial conflict. They could also embrace some of colonialism’s other characteristics such as its humanitarianism, and the beneficial effects of its desire to civilize and Christianize. These aspects of the phenomenon are usually ignored by protagonists of internal colonial theories. This is partly a consequence of the emphasis their analyses give to the examination of gross social inequities. Amongst those who dovetail their argument into a Marxist conceptual framework, this neglect is partly a corollary of its premise that the “mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life.”

The adaptability of the internal colonial concept, which has been related to states that once had empires and to those that were once colonies, to capitalist and to communist states, to entire political entities as well as to some of their constituent parts, as in the case of Alaska and Quebec, is incontrovertible. In the concept’s theoretical derivations, many of which should be classed as models rather than as theories, internal colonialism is sometimes equated primarily with the manner in which certain sections of society exercise their hegemony; in other cases it is regarded as a feature of the operation of uneven socioeconomic development; and occasionally these two approaches are integrated. Some version of a Marxist conceptual framework is integral to some internal colonial theories but not to others. What is a manifestation of capitalist accumulation in some theses is one of socialist accumulation in another. In some studies, internal colonialism occurs at a specific chronological period, during the latter part of the nineteenth century in parts of Latin America, or from the late 1920s in the USSR, but others either concede no such precision, or extend the process across several centuries. The colonizers sometimes constitute a majority of the population, sometimes a minority. The degree of prominence accorded to racism and to ethnicity varies greatly. Economic, political, social, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversities also receive different emphases and interpretations in the formulation and application of


the theories. Versions of the theory have examined the operation of policies
designed to integrate peoples with different cultures and languages in Latin
America, as well as policies which prevent such assimilation in South Africa.
The theories’ amenability to the adoption of a variety of perspectives and to
the selection of diverse evidence for their substantiation, and their capacity to
carry a range of explicit or implicit overtones and value judgments, are further
indications of their versatility.

What the concept gains in flexibility and adaptability, its theoretical ap-
lication loses in rigour. Many intractable problems confront the formulators
of internal colonial theories, and these difficulties are recognized by scholars
such as Gonzáles Casanova, Blauner, and Rodolfo Stavenhagen, and by
Hechter, whose theses are particularly influential. In Hechter’s opinion, for
instance, the theories are "painfully preliminary"33 at present. Some com-
bination of marked economic, cultural, and linguistic contrasts, frequently
related to a clear geographical separation between social groups or commu-
nities, which are themselves often ethnically distinct, provides some theories
with a degree of apparent credibility in certain contexts. Nevertheless, theo-
ries of internal colonialism have no agreed methodology, and are open to
criticism. Their imposition of an arguably artificial analogy upon a society
can be considered to be obscurantist and misleading. The lengthy chronologi-
cal span covered in many interpretations leads to superficiality. In general, the
theories offer too many explanations, and make too many deductions in an ad
hoc or an ex post facto manner. This leads to an evasion of too many earlier
developments and too many prior questions, and to an implicit idealization of
precolonial societies. It can also lead to the post hoc, ergo propter hoc
fallacy. Internal colonial theories imply an improbable degree of cohesion and
identity of interest amongst specific social groups, and they oversimplify
complex social structures and relationships. They sometimes overlook intra-
regional anomalies in their emphasis upon interregional differentiation. They
do not all distinguish between internal colonialism and internal colonization.
Their nature is such that they tend to assert or assume that which they are
endeavouring to demonstrate or prove, a practice which leads to intellectual
incoherence and a distortion of historical processes. Most studies appear to be
more concerned to demonstrate the validity of a particular analysis than to
explore the rich potential of the internal colonial concept in its entirety. In
contrast to some theories of Marxist derivation, Hechter’s theory does not
even refer to capitalism,34 while that of Blauner makes no explicit "mention
of economic exploitation or of political subjugation, the two most salient
features of colonialism."35

33 Hechter, Internal Colonialism, 6.
34 Ellen Kay Trimberger, "Review Article. World Systems Analysis: The Problem of Un-
equal Development," Theory and Society. 8:1 (July 1979), 132.
35 Das, "Internal Colonialism," 95.
The theories open up a range of semantic and methodological ambiguities that are frequently unresolved. The theme of exploitation runs through the theories, but what is exploitation from one perspective is seen as development from that of some others. "Class" might have a connotation that is Marxist, or Weberian, or one that is general rather than specific. The theoretical structure of several internal colonial theories that hinge upon a core-periphery nexus determines that when some relationships in the periphery are emphasized, others will be treated as if they were of secondary importance. Many internal colonial theories have been regarded as diffusionist in their orientation. Hechter, however, contrasts his theory with that of the diffusionist school of national development, but his version of their position is selective, and rather misleading. Furthermore, he and other internal colonial theorists have had to determine the extent to which they should relate their theories to other fields of scholarship and analysis. This requirement leads to additional ambiguities. For example, one reviewer noted the "fascinating secondary hypotheses about the role of imperialism in national integration" that Hechter's study generated, while another attributed that work's central weakness to the author's lack of an "adequate theory of imperialism to inform this analysis," and claimed that he inverted the "importance of ethnicity and imperialism."  

In theories of internal colonialism, the objectives of the colonizers and the identity of the colonizers and the colonized, can be vague. It is uncertain whether Transylvania should be regarded as a colony of Austria, or Hungary, or of both. Similarly, the specific identities of the colonial masters and of their subjects are imprecise in this context. The Canadian experience indicates another form of imprecision. If Quebec is considered as an internal colony in its relationship to Ontario, it is not one in its relationships with the maritime provinces. Within several internal colonial theories there is a different type of opacity. It is difficult to find any generally acceptable means by which to measure the progress of the movement.

However, neither semantic imprecision nor problems of methodology have impeded the growth of the study of colonialism and imperialism by historians. As Sir Keith Hancock and Philip D. Curtin have pointed out, the limitations of these words are so great that imperialism is not an appropriate term for scholars to use, and the history of the colonial experience cannot be written

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adequately until colonialism has been clarified or abandoned.40 Despite these fundamental problems, the study of colonialism and imperialism remains an established and endowed field of historical enquiry. The study of internal colonialism has not attained a similar status. Its protagonists are less numerous, and they are drawn from a variety of disciplines, amongst which that of historians appears to be conspicuously underrepresented. Their theories are less accepted by, and are, perhaps, less acceptable to, historians.

Although the methodologies of internal colonialism, colonialism, and imperialism are exposed to certain common criticisms, these criticisms appear to have deterred historians from making an effective use of the internal colonial concept. There is also a major and obvious contrast in the historical experience that these concepts attempt to explain. The propensity of some nations to embark upon empire building, and to exercise extensive and intensive influence over independent communities, is undeniable. Although internal colonialism can be regarded as the operation within a country of these expansive forces which can be clearly seen as they affect external communities, there can be no similar certainty that internal colonialism took place. This uncertainty is a particular problem for historians, who are “accustomed to accept only things proved by irrefutable documentation.”41 Consequently, arguments that rest upon a premise of internal colonialism, or which attempt to show how internal colonialism functioned, are inherently equivocal and far less easily demonstrable, if, in fact, they are amenable to demonstration.

The study of internal colonialism can derive little methodological strength from scholarship that relates to colonialism. Some historians continue to adhere to the legal definition and equate colonialism with formal political control. The attainment of independence, however, is not necessarily as definitive as the change in legal status suggests. African opinion, for instance, has questioned and challenged the legality and sovereignty of the South African state for several years.42 In most respects, colonialism is a contentious subject. “Western scholars have not really come to grips with the phe-


41 Braudel, Capitalism and Material Life, 6–7. For a cynical view of the value of an original document, acquired while in governmental service in British Central Africa, and wry amusement at the thought of a “stupid old historian taking infinite pains to get to the original Foreign Office despatches and thinking that at last he had hit on the truth, the plain and uncontroversed truth,” see H. Alan C. Cairns, Prelude to Imperialism. British Reactions to Central African Society, 1840–1890 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 237.

42 See Heribert Adam, “‘Perspectives in the Literature: A Critical Evaluation,’” in Heribert Adam and Hermann Giliomee, The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power (Cape Town: David Philip, 1979), 50–60, for reservations about the validity of the colonial analogy, and also about the “conceptualization of white rule as domestic colonialism,” so far as South Africa is concerned.
nomenon. The academic establishment possesses no widely accepted theory of colonialism, nor does any substantial agreement exist upon what colonialism is.\textsuperscript{43} The movement’s economic character and content are increasingly stressed. A principal defence of colonialism attributes to it the abundance of evidence of material progress, say in Africa after 1870, and demographic evidence of a rising life expectancy and the growth in population, as well as a contribution to the political progress of the subjected peoples. A principal criticism of colonial rule is that it entails economic “exploitation,” hinders and distorts the advancement of indigenous peoples, and sets in motion a process of underdevelopment that political independence does not necessarily terminate.\textsuperscript{44}

The problem of continuing underdevelopment and dependency has created a comparatively new, wide-ranging, prolific, and disputatious body of scholarship which challenges traditional views of modernization and more orthodox Marxist approaches too.\textsuperscript{45} Analyses of dependency, of which internal colonial theses have been considered a part,\textsuperscript{46} are inextricably linked to the study of colonialism and imperialism. They try to ascertain the mechanics of dependent economies from the standpoint of the world’s economic structure. At the risk of oversimplification, it can be said that there appears to be one school of interpretation, with bases in the troublesome problem of unequal

\textsuperscript{43} Ronald J. Horvath, “‘A Definition of Colonialism,’” \textit{Current Anthropology}, 13:1 (February 1972), 45.


exchange, that stems from the work of André Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein, and another, which has roots in Lenin’s analysis of productive relations’ combined and uneven development, that emanates from the studies of Ernest Mandel and, it might be suggested, from those of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Samir Amin. The latter, however, extend their theory well beyond exclusively economic considerations. Although these interpretations differ profoundly in their definitions of feudal and capitalist societies, as well as in their analyses of capitalist expansion throughout the world, each detects an integral and dynamic interrelationship between “development” and its requirement for “underdevelopment.” Furthermore, in these interpretations, underdevelopment is unlikely to be transitory because the societies and economies which manifest its characteristics have had their evolution so distorted by more advanced economies that the prospects of overcoming established structural imbalances are remote. Although the literature on dependency, like that on internal colonialism, raises as many problems as it answers, and although historians “would probably find the evidence in the historical part rather thin,” it has contributed to the formation of a “consensus that the history of colonialism can only be meaningful[ly] approached in the broader spectrum of underdevelopment and the specific problems of the Third World.”

The methodology of some defenders and some critics of colonial rule has its distinctive characteristics. Some scholars employ the “principle of unheeded qualification by which a verifying procedure is adopted and negative cases are discounted.” The broader generalization subsumes evidence that contradicts the interpretation offered, and the “imponderable is set in pursuit of the unprovable.” Where the principle of the expanding tautology is utilized, the treatment “as precise and objective [of] categories which are imprecise and subjective,” and the addition to the mistreated categories of “terms whose meaning is clear but limited to those whose meaning is cloudy and unlimited,” are as discernible as are arguments which endeavour to connect “concepts that are unable to carry the weight laid on them.”

Such negative effects of colonialism as the potential to increase production


that was not realized, the possibility of industrialization that did not occur, and the surplus capital that failed to be generated, are features of analyses of underdevelopment. Since the attainment of independence, however, local ruling classes have frequently implemented policies that continued and perpetuated these characteristics and conditions. This has led to the disputed proposition that the experience of Latin America, for example, has demonstrated that underdevelopment is not a decisive consequence of colonialism. Because of the number of variables involved and the incomparability of costs and benefits, it is probably impossible to ascertain objectively whether the colonial experience benefited Africa economically.\(^2\) In a similar way, value judgements that affect assessment of the social impact of the colonial experience, and the moral issues connected to it, virtually preclude objectivity. Any attempt to evaluate comparatively the unique riverside communities of African descent in Surinam with other communities of African extraction in the Americas illustrates the difficulties of such an exercise. The former broke away from slavery, fought successfully against the Dutch colonial authorities, and gained the freedom to retain and preserve the culture of their ancestors, while the culture of the latter was destroyed before they received freedom.

The study of imperialism, in which that of colonialism is often grounded, or by which it is influenced, is an even more diffuse corpus of interpretative scholarship than that of colonialism. Imperialism was a policy of capitalist societies in the analyses of J. A. Hobson and Karl Kautsky; it was presented as an integral part of the development of those societies after 1898 in the work of Lenin; and it has, in the opinion of Chinese communists, characterized the actions of the USSR. There is no consensus about the chronology of imperialism or about the primacy of causal agencies within it. Even its precise economic causes and effects remain sources of continuing debate within and between different schools of analysis. The study of imperialism is not enhanced by its theorists’ relative unfamiliarity with much of the primary material concerning imperial expansion used by historians, or by many historians’ misreading of the theories which they evaluate from that material,\(^3\) or “by the fact that really good studies of colonial regimes are few in number, unevenly devoted to different territories and based on different principles and methods.”\(^4\)

Some recent studies of imperialism have produced interpretations that have a tenuous affinity with the concept of internal colonialism. During the 1970s,


\(^3\) Norman A. Etherington, “‘Theories of Imperialism Revisited in Southern Africa’” (paper delivered at South African Historical Association Conference, University of Durban-Westville, June-July 1981), 1–5.

the idea of social imperialism gained increasing acceptance in German historical circles, but its connotation differed from that which it possessed before 1914. Seminal ideas from studies of German imperialism fell upon ground prepared by the influence of the thought of Marx and Lenin, and of the Fritz Fischer-Immanuel Geiss school of historiography. The studies that made the current idea of social imperialism acceptable in Germany concentrated upon German decision makers and their "conservative policies of diversion and constraint." The thesis maintains that their adept accommodation to imperialist demands during the economic crises of the late nineteenth century either distracted Germans away from social and political reforms or acted as a prophylactic against their seductions. Although social imperialism in this sense would carry more conviction if it specified more clearly the sections of society that the policies intended to mobilize and the degree of success that they attained, the interpretation itself does not appear inimical to the internal colonial concept. However, the theory of internal colonialism with which Hechter analyses relationships within the British Isles yields marked contrasts if applied to Germany. German social democrats, particularly during the 1920s, appear to fulfill some of the roles assigned to conservatives in the United Kingdom, for theirs were the main large, consistently centralizing parties. The German experience thus undermines the general validity of Hechter's theory, in which the centralizing party represents the interests of the higher strata of the "cultural division of labor." Neither the social democrats in Germany nor the national socialists fit neatly into this category. The use of theories of colonialism and imperialism in contexts different from those in which they have been employed initially frequently reveals anomalies, inconsistencies, and incompatibilities within them, as well as varieties of experience, of practice, of regional character, and of social and economic disparity, that undermine conviction in their general validity. Moreover, there is no foreseeable prospect of securing a generally acceptable redefinition of colonialism and imperialism. Consequently, the ambiguities and weaknesses of these terms will impinge inexorably upon approaches or theories that emanate from the internal colonial concept. Even if the validity of this concept is accepted, it will remain, to a considerable extent, a concept in search of a methodology. It provides a means of approaching domestic historical problems from a particular perspective, one that leans heavily upon comparisons with the colonial experience, and one that draws upon alleged parallels between policies, attitudes, and developments that are discernible


within a country as they are within a colony, or within both a metropolitan power and its colonies. This dependence upon comparisons and parallels is not a source of methodological strength. Comparative history lacks an agreed methodology; "formidable difficulties" confront its practitioners; and there have been "relatively few successful efforts to apply the comparative method rigorously."^57 There is also a "wide gap" between "noticing a parallel and establishing an identity."^58

The evolution of distinct disciplines and diverse methodologies within the social sciences has responsibility for some of the methodological issues to which passing reference has been made. The reciprocal influences that flow between these disciplines augment these difficulties, and the parameters within which historians work make their own contribution to them. Historians have not been inclined to theorize about their discipline until comparatively recently.^59 Their formal training, however, obliges them to extract from events a thesis in order to bring their version of order to the complexities and confusions of the past. They do not collect facts in a random way but marshal them according to certain principles of selection, some of which they might be unaware, and which they have the circumspection to refrain from attempting to validate in any scientific way. These principles guide the research and determine the relevance of source material to the problematic questions which scholars raise in connexion with a particular time and locality. When historians explore causal relationships, they ought to distinguish between the conditions that made a sequence of events practicable and the causes that gave them effect, but they implicitly disavow any intention of attempting to establish strict causal relationships in terms acceptable to logicians or natural scientists. Historians' explanations assume that the connexion between events is a contingent one, and that the developments that occurred could, within strict limits, have taken a different direction.

The efforts of historians to explain why individuals or sections of society acted in the manner they did in a specific environment and at a particular time


has been described as their most consistently important purpose.\textsuperscript{60} If this assessment is correct, one might suggest that the internal colonial concept is not "totally useless,"	extsuperscript{61} and that it merits the consideration of historians because of its potential value as a tool of explanation. If they elect to adopt an approach that derives from this concept, historians expose themselves to the criticism that it is "always easy to find corroboration for one's own theories and prejudices in the defenceless past; the question is whether such violations of the past deserve to be dignified as history."\textsuperscript{62} They can, however, find solace in the knowledge that a conventional approach is no guarantee of immunity from such an attack. This criticism was directed against a study that became in some quarters a standard history of southern Africa.

It would probably be more difficult for historians than for other social scientists to make use of the internal colonial concept. Because of the traditions of their discipline, and its emphasis upon the uniqueness of each historical experience, many historians would face a fundamental difficulty in formulating an explicitly stated approach or theory that emanated from this, or most other, abstract concepts. They would also be aware that deficiencies in its application would generate criticism of their approach, and that some of these deficiencies would be virtually unavoidable. An internal colonial approach is inherently oriented towards exposing the inadequacies of scholars who venture to adopt it. Their degree of success would be determined by the extent of their familiarity with a dauntingly large range of domestic and external source material, their mastery of the scholarship relating to the country selected, and their ability to overcome the effects of earlier specialist training.

Nevertheless, theories of internal colonialism are filtering into the interstices of inadequacy that some scholars perceive in the traditional approaches of their respective disciplines. Some studies of racism, of ethnicity, of pluralistic societies' functioning, of underdevelopment, and of dependency, are representative of this tendency. In the present stage of formulation, theories of internal colonialism are in their infancy, possess intrinsic weaknesses, and make no attempt to exercise the full range of options offered by the concept from which they originate. These deficiencies appear to limit the effectiveness of the theories in specific environments, or to make them unsuitable for general use, rather than to invalidate the concept from which they derive.


\textsuperscript{61} Etherington, "Theories of Imperialism," 29.

\textsuperscript{62} B. Liebenberg, "'Eric Walker's Interpretation of Recent South African History.'" Historia, 11:3 (1966), 183.
However, the limitations of the theories, which in some instances are alleged or assumed rather than demonstrated, and the "slipperiness" of the imagery that they employ, have led to the objection that the concept itself is so emotive and biased that it ought to be avoided. Its theorists ignore the unpopular but "obvious fact... that colonialism was not devoid of benefits." They obscure variations in the colonial experience; they seldom acknowledge the universality of colonialism; and they belittle the "magnanimity of the majority and the accomplishments of the minority" in a country such as the United States.

On the other hand, scholars' distrust of internal colonial theory and their unwillingness to participate in its development have helped to bring about this situation. The contributions of scholars who draw their inspiration from intellectual sources and traditions that differ from many of those who employ a theory of internal colonialism, scholars who are better informed, or informed in a different way, about colonialism could provide an alternative to avoidance of the concept, assuming that the grounds advanced warrant avoidance. Their work could enrich, diversify, and give greater precision to the theoretical bases of current analyses. It could improve the ways in which some internal colonial theories are used, and could also promote the development of a school of scholarship in which balance and comprehensiveness were more prominent. The reluctance of influential groups of scholars to explore the possibilities of the internal colonial concept has contributed to the disproportionate significance of the biased and subjective characteristics of some of the theories.

If internal colonial theories have come under suspicion in certain circles because of the influence of Marxist thought that is apparent in some of them, it should be noted that there were Europeans prior to the integrated articulation of socialist doctrines who expressed themselves in ways which suggest that they would not have found the internal colonial concept alien. The Reverend Joseph Townsend regarded eighteenth-century county workhouses in England as colonies "to which a few of the superabundant members of the community have been transported to make room for others." The More sisters considered that their late-eighteenth-century schemes of social and religious engineering were creating colonies, a "Botany Bay" and a "Sierra Leone," in the Mendips. "Colonies for the poor" were successfully estab-

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64 [The Reverend Joseph Townsend], *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws. By a Well-wisher to Mankind* ([London?): n.p., 1786], 73.

lished at Frederick’s Oord in northern Holland from 1818.66 Alexander D’Junkovsky translated William Allen’s Colonies at Home: or, The Means for Rendering The Industrious Labourer Independent of Parish Relief (1826) into the Russian language, and the Russian minister of the interior “‘ordered it to be translated into German for the use of German colonists in Russia.’”67 Maria Edgeworth had no doubt that “‘colonization at home would be preferable to colonization abroad, if it can be carried into effect, because it would, in the first place, save all the risk, expense, and suffering of emigration, and would, in the next place, secure the home country the benefits of increased and improved cultivation and civilization.’”68 Domestic colonization was not effected by means of the popularization and proliferation of small-scale, philanthropic, and carefully directed ventures. These experiments were expensive, they required close supervision, and they were becoming increasingly anachronistic as support for economic liberalism gained strength. On the other hand, James Kay-Shuttleworth noted in the 1830s that the “‘increase of the manufacturing establishments’” in a district led to its “‘consequent colonisation,’” and that the rapidity of these developments outstripped the “‘growth of its civic institutions.’”69

Colonial enterprise can be regarded as a consequence of part of the external activities of a political entity’s social forces, which a particular concatenation of circumstances made practicable. Furthermore, some of the practices that it effected, and the policies that it implemented, can be related to, and were sometimes extensions of, practices and policies which these social forces had imposed upon specific sections of the metropolitan society. In mid-sixteenth-century England, for instance, the indolent poor could be enslaved.70 “‘White servitude,’” according to Eric Williams, “‘was the historic base upon which Negro slavery was constructed,’” and he cites Ulrich B. Phillips’s claim that “‘the Africans were latecomers fitted into a system already developed.’”71 Contemporaneously, the social forces of expansive societies were having a powerful impact within each metropolitan country too. If there was something

70 Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor, (London: n.p., 1808), V, 7–8.
novel in the colonial enterprise of certain powers in the decades after 1870, there were unprecedented developments occurring within each of them too. The Third Republic’s colonial policies impinged upon the customs, values, economies, and social structures of diverse overseas communities, and they also helped to diffuse the language, culture, and civilization of urban France amongst them. Its domestic policies had analogous effects upon the French peasant communities. At the time the Republic was established, perhaps half of its citizens in the mother country had little, if any, fluency in the French language. Republican governments disseminated the French language vigorously, and had undermined the peasants’ regional linguistic traditions and affiliations decisively by 1914. To an unparalleled extent, French domestic policies also induced the peasants to abandon many customary practices, values, ways of learning, and types of knowledge. Jules Ferry espoused compulsory schooling and colonial initiatives. One might suggest, however, that political entities’ internal and external policies are too frequently studied separately, and that because of this propensity, keys of understanding and explanation remain hidden. In the opinion of one of the concept’s protagonists, internal colonial theses could help to “bridge the distinction commonly perceived between so-called international relations and internal social relations.” A means of enquiry that can, prima facie, be used by scholars irrespective of the school of analysis to which they belong, one that has value as a means by which to integrate a political entity’s domestic and external activities, or to show the relationships and interrelationships between them, merits consideration on those grounds alone.

Approaches inspired by the internal colonial concept might also assist historians and other social scientists who orient their work towards specific domestic issues or perceived problems. The association of many internal colonial theories with research into problems of ethnicity tends to conceal the relevance of this mode of interpretation for some sections of heterogeneous societies that are not readily distinguishable on grounds of ethnicity, and for groups and subgroups within some relatively homogeneous societies. In an analogous manner, studies of underdevelopment and dependency can overlook or underemphasize the existence of underdevelopment and dependency within certain social groups, and/or within specific regions, of a nation that has allegedly contributed to the underdevelopment of another. Features of internal colonial theories such as the domination exercised by certain sections of society over others, segregation by residential location, and the interplay of

72 Sir Edward Grey did not consider the growth of the “Imperial idea” in Britain “so remarkable: it was rather that the expression of it had been more remarkable than it had ever been before.” Newcastle-upon-Tyne Daily Chronicle, 6 February 1899.
different cultures and value systems are discernible in societies such as that of England, which, by some criteria, became a multiracial society only after 1945. Regional disparities, and socioeconomic inequalities of the type experienced by manual workers and their families, which consistently characterized this society in the nineteenth century, have persisted despite the formation of the Labour party, the concession of political equality, and the implementation of many twentieth-century policies that purported to create a more equitable society. The persistence of these inequalities is better documented\(^7\) than adequately explained by existing approaches and analyses.

Studies influenced by the internal colonial concept might also promote the flow of knowledge from one cognate area of specialization to another, even within a single discipline, and assist in its integration and reorientation. If internal colonization is regarded as the material means by which modern societies have accommodated and adjusted to unprecedentedly large populations—far more people, incidentally, than were to emigrate from the major colonial powers—the study of demographic changes within a country, of patterns of settlement, and of the development or exploitation of previously untapped resources could receive further impetus; such an extension could provide opportunities for specialists in demography, in urban, local, and economic history, and even in historical geography, a discipline which already has expertise in this mode of analysis. The treatment of internal colonization under this definition would also require supplementary research into the political and institutional developments that were related to demographic, industrial, and urban transformations, as well as into the formulation and implementation of social and economic policies. If internal colonialism is regarded as the combination of influences and processes which operate upon people's hearts and minds, it appears to have particular relevance for such specialists as those concerned with religious studies, intellectual and cultural history, and the history of education.

The internal colonial concept might also have seminal value for scholars who are attracted to the comparative study of society and history. The treatment of certain metropolitan societies, or the experience of certain sections of a metropolitan society and that of their colonial counterparts, in a comparative way and within an internal colonial framework might help to identify features of their respective experiences that could pass undetected, or be given insufficient emphasis, or be misinterpreted, if they were studied separately by other means. This mode of enquiry might even prove appropriate for the com-

parative consideration of societies that are regarded as sovereign states, rather than as metropoles, provided that there were numerous and varied ties and interrelationships between them. There were unequivocally close and important bonds between the United Kingdom and the United States of America in the nineteenth century. However, the traditional scholarship of American—and English—historians has tended to neglect the importance of these links. The “English, who have contributed the most to American culture, have been studied the least by students of immigration.”

Studies from a comparative internal colonial perspective of the reciprocal influences between societies with distinctive and changing characteristics, which would probably be prominent in this type of case, appear to have a relevance in certain imperial contexts too. They might throw additional light upon some causal and consequential factors that relate to imperial expansion and to imperial liquidation. The racial policies of South African governments, for example, stimulated Indian nationalism, and strengthened centrifugal forces within the empire-commonwealth in other ways too. In these policies’ development, however, the attitudes of late-nineteenth-century migrants to South Africa had played their part. They augmented currents of will, opinion, and belief that had developed within the comparatively isolated Afrikaner community. These primarily English-speaking immigrants justified the colour bar; they secured protection behind it; their Labour party “first appealed to the white voters of South Africa with a full-blooded programme of racial segregation”; and it was the interaction of the views and perceived interests of the two groups of white colonists that eventually brought the establishment of apartheid. Alternatively, scholars influenced by the internal colonial concept could compare the attitudes of politicians or literary figures towards domestic and colonial, or internal and external issues. In some instances, their work might show that certain perceived uniformities, or dichotomies and inconsistencies, in an individual’s views are more apparent than real. In connexion with William Wilberforce, for example, this type of approach could lead to an emphasis upon the primacy of his desire to extend the influence of Christianity amongst British people, slaves, Africans, and Indians, and upon the basic similarity of his attitude towards these communities within the context of his support for policies leading towards economic liberalism, and his conviction of Britian’s international superiority and of the intranational superiority of its elites. An interpretation of this nature would help to account for those contrasting features of his activities that perplexed and irritated William Cobbett and Wilber-

force’s other contemporary critics. They had difficulty in reconciling his solicit for the well-being of slaves with his relative indifference towards the physical hardships of many British people and with his consistent support for onerous and repressive domestic legislation.

There is a natural phenomenon that has its similarities to the relationship of social scientists to their area of specialization. The "colours of the rainbow," as W. E. Gladstone once informed an inquisitive journalist, "are in us, not in it," and he might have added that they are perceptible only from specific locations. If this analogy has validity, it is possible that the utilization of the internal colonial concept could augment some social scientists’ perceptions of society, and diversify the ways in which they study it. The approaches that emanate from the concept might elect to be more influenced by parts of the wide-ranging scholarship that imperial activity has helped to promote. They might, for example, find J. A. Schumpeter’s thesis about atavistic influences within society, or that of Johan Galtung about the importance of the combined effects of relations within and between countries, suitable for further exploration, refinement, and reorientation. There is at least the possibility that approaches that stem from, or are influenced by, the internal colonial concept could have value as a means of supplementing current interpretative, analytical, and explanatory modes and practices. Supplementary avenues of enquiry of this type might have an important role to play in the study of social history. This has become an area of vigorous research activity, one in which some social historians use "concepts from other social sciences." However, a recent survey of its historiography has detected fragmentation, the absence of a "systematic approach," the lack of a dominant school, and a "still developing debate over fundamentals . . . that embraces both methodology and conceptualization." Internal colonial theses might assist some historians who work in that environment at a time when there is a novel and "great increase in the interpretative ambition, scope and self-consciousness with which narrative and formal modes of explanation are counterpointed." Internal colonial analyses might help to bring aspects of society which are studied separately into a closer relationship. Internal colonial interpretations might show the dynamic interrelationships in society more effectively than studies of "modernization." The latter’s theoretical structures often lead to an overemphasis upon the passivity and malleability of certain sections of

society, and a failure to allow for the continuing influence of those groups' norms upon the wider society. The possibilities of the internal colonial concept may even take some scholars in a direction whose destination one of the doyens of the historical profession has sighted. "For historians, for all other social scientists, and for all objective scientists, there will always be a new America to discover."