

Canadian Municipal Colonialism and Public Health: A Critical Examination of the  
Foucauldian Town and Racial Exclusion

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In a series of lectures from *Security, Territory, Population*, Michel Foucault argues that a “good quality of the state depend[s] on good quality of elements.”<sup>1</sup> If we refer to the state’s elements as people, then this means that a good city relies on a regulated and policed system to ensure the public good and reduce danger. Foucauldian analysis of the town can be applied to Canadian municipal colonialism, by bringing to question new social issues such as underlying hierarchies of racial exclusion embedded in urban development. Although Canada’s history of colonialism is complex and ongoing, it is important to recognize the consequences which led to the making of Canada’s present social, political, and cultural aspects. While scholars should refrain from pigeonholing Foucault’s theories as the only voice of their selected topic, his analysis helps historians understand the motives at play behind political systems. Therefore, my essay will focus on a microcosm of Canadian colonial history, which is the city, and how understanding urban racialized exclusion aligns with Foucault’s framework of the town.

Foucault’s arguments cannot relate to every urban situation regardless of place and time period. Urban settlements are designed and continually function in different ways, and change throughout time, therefore we must be cautious to avoid generalizations. Foucault traces elements of change in cities throughout time, but he situates ideas of power and circulation in the town within a particular context and time period. The first section of this essay will observe examples of Foucault’s writings on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century French towns as closed structures with specific legal administrations and military functions. This includes a critical comparison to a selection of Canadian cities, and their efforts to exclude or assimilate indigenous populations from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to Foucault’s time. The second section will reconstruct issues of circulation

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-1978*, ed. Arnold J. Davidson, trans. Graham Burchell, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 322.

and governmentality through public health measures, and urban renewal as a justification for marginalizing minority populations. By applying Foucault's theory to Canadian municipal colonialism, this essay will argue that although the majority benefits, urban renewal and public health legislation oftentimes invoke consequences of racialized exclusion and removal. Therefore, the issue of exclusion in Canadian cities is justified by a brand of "rational" governmentality, embedded with racialized mentalities.

There are a few Foucauldian key words and concepts which support this claim in addition to governmentality. The problem of circulation, controlling a city's good and bad effects, results in exclusion, and is justified by notions of public health and social welfare. To understand how Foucault defines the town as a territory, I first address his argument of the town as an entity with a cyclical relationship to sovereignty. In other words, governance responds to new problems, and requires new power mechanisms, which further legitimizes the sovereign, thus creating a circular effect.<sup>2</sup> A town in the European and Foucauldian sense operates, "from state as power of rational intervention on individuals, com[ing] back to state as growing set of forces."<sup>3</sup> This also makes the sovereign's power subtle, and this attributes to James Scott's concept of legibility. In *Seeing like a State*, Scott challenges state power, because of its ability to centralize and homogenize society under the guise of rational planning and improvement.<sup>4</sup> Tina Loo applies Scott's legibility towards Canadian 1960s urban renewal, in which state intervention makes objects legible by using population as units of administration.<sup>5</sup> Over time, the invisibility of the settler

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 289

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 325

<sup>4</sup> James Scott, *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Tina Loo, "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada," in *Acadiensis*, 39, 2 (2010), 9.

becomes “normative,” and urban circulation operates based on decisions of who belongs where, and creating reservations.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Canadian urbanism has a legacy of settler colonial structures, which have often been invisible and internalized. This includes urban planning, and the disadvantaging of indigenous communities and other minorities. Legibility also presents itself through certain state institutions and architectural planning practices, supported by these internalized racial hierarchies. In regards to state institutions, in *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault associates the police as evolving in tandem with urbanization, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as primarily an urban institution. Their main objectives in the city are controlling circulation to ensure the population’s safety and those who govern it, over the sole protection of the sovereign and territory.<sup>7</sup> However, I argue that policing in Canadian cities also enforced colonialist legislation, fostered by hegemonic social and political values which dictate the majority’s welfare.

Therefore, Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is also important for this essay. It is an active layering and choosing of a particular identity by a privileged population, and creating a structure which justifies belonging and exclusion.<sup>8</sup> For example, Evengy Efremkin’s essay titled, “Canada’s Invisible National Policy,” argues that hegemonic ideals significantly influenced Canadian border customs agents in the 1930s. By classifying and making corrections to immigrants’ passenger manifests, border officials’ personal preferences embodied dominant

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<sup>6</sup> Excerpts from both Michel Hogue, *Metis and the Medicine Line: Creating a Border, Dividing a People*, (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2015) and Lorenzo Veracini, “Introduction,” in *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Security, Territory, Population*, 65

<sup>8</sup> Referenced in Robert W. Cox, “Gramsci, hegemony and international relations: an essay in method,” in Stephen Gill (ed.), *Gramsci, historical materialism and international relations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 49-66).

discourses to determine who did or did not belong.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the state policies of exclusion are legitimized by certain practices and people, and this reinforces a circular effect. In other words, practices of “rational” exclusion reflects back to the state in terms of unraveling underlying racial constructs, which also applies to the municipality.

These concepts of hegemony, legibility, visibility and the sovereign invisibility dictates governmentality and justifies urban renewal. Examples of these concepts at play involve dividing and surveying lands, and controlling its subjects predominately through public health and welfare administration. Foucault applies governmentality in a town which governs itself and is governed on the basis of individuals or a group, and controlling their well-being.<sup>10</sup> Canadian municipal history involves the transformation from common property to private, as a means to circulate and control people. For example, Daniel Rueck’s writes about the parceling of Kahnawake reservations by Indian Affairs as a means to ensure “sustainability” of its population through hegemonic ideas of proper land use.<sup>11</sup> Similar methods occurred in Vancouver, in which Jordan Stanger-Ross argues that municipal officials dislocated its reserves and occupants based on an ideological project of urban rejuvenation to legitimize colonial expansion.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the following section will examine how urban space is made through a process of unmaking land and surveyed, using comparisons between Foucault and case studies in Vancouver and Kahnawake.

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<sup>9</sup> Evengy Efremkin, “Canada’s Invisible National Policy: Creating Ethnicity, Managing Populations, Imagining a Nation,” in *Canadian Historical Association*, 24, 2 (2013).

<sup>10</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Security, Territory, Population*, 122

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Rueck, “Commons, Enclosure, and Resistance in Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, 1850-1900,” in *Canadian Historical Review*, 95, 3 (2010), 362.

<sup>12</sup> Jordan Stanger-Ross, “Municipal Colonialism in Vancouver: City Planning and Conflict over Indian Reserves, 1928-1950s,” in *Canadian Historical Review*, 89, 4 (2008), 542.

In order for a town to operate according to rationally disciplining people and goods, it must be constructed in a manner which dictates this mode of governmentality. Beginning with Foucault's description of how magistrates designed typical 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century French cities compares to legibility—building a space which makes people and objects legible to circulate. Early modern French towns, such as Richelieu, were designed to resemble Roman Camps with military functions to subdivide the area and discipline its troops.<sup>13</sup> Subdividing Richelieu consisted of creating central streets with different distances and sizes and in rectangles of varying size.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the schema to understand a town, especially a capital city, is “through a grid of sovereignty.”<sup>15</sup> Foucault goes on to describe early modern city planning as a precedent to controlling and circulating new urban problems. For example, he draws from Pierre Lalive's writing on the history of Nantes, a city designed to restrict the ventilation of “morbid miasmas” throughout its central neighbourhood.<sup>16</sup> By connecting external roads to oversee the transfer of goods, and surveying town walls and city ventilation, Nantes' layout became a matter of circulation, eliminating danger and overcrowding, and maximizing good, while diminishing the bad.<sup>17</sup> However, Nantes also reflects new problems of compression and enclosure, and Foucault questions what gets lost within a town's subdivisions. Surveying and dividing land thus became entangled within a single walled space, also known as an enclosure in Foucault's words. Enclosures are designed to discipline and legitimize its population, but also to maximize public benefit and eliminate dangers and epidemics.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 15

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 16

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 12

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 18

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 18

When compared to Canadian space, enclosure becomes a different and complex definition. In “Commons, Enclosure, and Resistance in Kahnawake Mohawk Territory,” Daniel Rueck situates the history of colonialist land acquisition and resource extraction by the Department of Indian Affairs in 1880s Kahnawake, Quebec. Rueck’s definition of enclosure is a “global movement,” which involves marking land “in discrete land parcels to replace community regime into private property.”<sup>18</sup> The Walbank Survey, constructed in 1888 enabled the DIA to subdivide the reserves, legitimized by the social construct of conducting a “civilizing mission,” and a duty to protect those of whom they deemed suffering.<sup>19</sup> The process of transforming land towards a “grid of sovereignty” resembles the Roman Camp, a space constructed to closely survey its subjects. However, unlike strictly for military functions, Kahnawake represents the undoing of traditionally shared property and excluding others from their own resources for the purpose of extending colonial authority and development. To do this, the state uses maps, surveys, and lot numbering in order to make reserves and their subjects legible to control. This situation resembles Nantes, in the sense that territory becomes mapped and surveyed to subdue disorder for a unified prosperity. In Kahnawake, indigenous uses of land considered improper and uncontrolled by Indian Affairs, is eliminated to make way for bounded and measured property allocated to each individual. This also creates a power circulation, in which the DIA imposes a “rationalized” design to restrict and exclude others. In turn, this design perpetuates the need for subjects to turn back to Indian agents to claim land ownership or settle disputes. However, like Nantes, Kahnawake also becomes lost in its own subdivisions through a series of claimant systems, resistance to surveying, and complicated bureaucratic logic.<sup>20</sup> Because of this,

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<sup>18</sup> Rueck, Daniel, “Commons, Enclosure, and Resistance in Kahnawake Mohawk Territory,” 354.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 364.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 368.

the DIA left residents of Kahnawake to their own devices of transferring and managing land, and this created issues of power vacuums and a legacy of “unsettled estates.”<sup>21</sup> A similar case study in Vancouver represents making new spaces to exclude or dislocate a particular community within a more strictly urban setting than Kahnawake. Although the next section of the essay goes into further detail, the city’s plans to modernize and beautify between the 1920s and 1950s, involved surveying and removing First Nations reserves. City officials continually derive new plans for the city by building new parks to make Vancouver appear “organic,” “cultivated,” and embodying a “civilized nature,” which propels need to replace the reserves.<sup>22</sup> This proves that urban planning in Canada often coincided with territorial demarcation and circulation to ensure improvement and well-being. Therefore, Foucault’s framework of the town is useful to establish connections to specific Canadian cities, and it helps us uncover underlying mentalities that legitimized racialized exclusion. They are not only hegemonic, but they also represent the “rationalization” behind Foucauldian governmentality in municipal colonialism. Practices that involve surveying, border-making or mapping, and stakeholders such as bureaucrats, police, or city officials are the power mechanisms behind governmentality. Once the town has been designed, it must be preserved to benefit the majority. From this, the next section will carry forward issues of circulation, governmentality and legitimacy and their association with health care measures.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault historicizes the plague in early modern towns to explain the process of emerging disciplinary mechanisms, such as individualization, categorization, inclusion and exclusion. Although *Discipline and Punish* focuses mainly on

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 380.

<sup>22</sup> Stanger-Ross, Jordan, “Municipal Colonialism in Vancouver,” 556.

prison reform and surveillance, and vastly differs in certain areas from *Security, Territory, and Population*, Foucault provides a good example of early modern, urban power and circulation. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the plague resulted in “strict spatial partitioning,” closing of districts, and dividing the town for local authorities to survey.<sup>23</sup> This created a situation in which the town became an “enclosed, segmented space observed at every point,” with everyone in their own place, and their movements supervised through registration documents monitored by magistrates.<sup>24</sup> Overall, the plague represents an invisible sovereign power making subjects legible, and an exercise of control over urban circulation through the problem of public health. More importantly, it facilitated a culture of marking exclusion, in “which individual differentiations were constricting efforts of a multiplied power, and subdivided.”<sup>25</sup> Foucault continues to discuss new urban problems related to population density and well-being, which requires a close surveillance of a town’s good and bad elements. To restrict this kind of circulation to keep out “miasmas”—things that cause disease—involves controlling aeration and ventilation, and an urban governmentality “organized and subordinated to concerns and principles of health.”<sup>26</sup> In Foucauldian towns, the police become the organizational body in charge of maintaining the town’s public good, and removing or diminishing the miasmas. Consequently, this means surveying or eliminating the poor, excluding those who cannot work, thus showing that circulation goes further than preventing disease.<sup>27</sup> This demonstrates a new kind of urban power through policing inclusion and exclusion, using people as miasmas, and acting upon hegemonic

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<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Modern Prison*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: Random House, 1978), eBook, 195.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 196

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 197

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Security, Territory, Population*, 325

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 334

constructs to enforce public sanitation. Governmentality becomes an important theme, because in the case of the plague, controlling the circulation of disease and excluding others is internalized into a form of governing conceived as rational.

Although there are obvious differences between Foucault's analysis of the town and Canada's cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Foucault establishes a background for how municipalities use public health measures to exclude populations. However, he mostly omits the problem of structural racism embedded into situations of urban renewal in Canada. Michel Hogue in his book *Metis and the Medicine Line*, chronicles the history of Canadian border-making in the West, and the politics of racial division with a "spatial re-organization of the land [and the] superimposition of borders."<sup>28</sup> One example of this is a spatial re-mapping of Vancouver amidst the smallpox crisis in 1860. During this time, Victoria significantly increased in population, with the surge of gold rush migrants, and British Columbia emerged into Canada as a province. With a higher population and new colonial powers, administrators used public health legislation through smallpox, as a motive to segregate its First Nations populations out of white fears of social and sexual contact.<sup>29</sup> By clearing reserves outside New Westminster and burning homes, magistrates associated smallpox with local bodies in order to control space and population for colonialist purposes.<sup>30</sup> From that point onward, Vancouver continued to be a centre of colonial urbanism in Canada. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the city developed a plan to build new, modern urban spaces through municipal colonialism—in other words, entwining

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<sup>28</sup> Hogue, Michel, *Metis and the Medicine Line*, Chapter 3.

<sup>29</sup> Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 111.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

urban renewal with racialized exclusion.<sup>31</sup> Jordan Stanger-Ross argues that through city planning and controlling reserves, officials justified removal through demarcating the reserve as a slum, a severe misuse of land, and a barrier to beautifying the city for tourists.<sup>32</sup> For example, the presence of Kitsilano and Musqueam reserves in parks affected colonial mentalities of the city's "healthy" appearance, and created higher demand for city acquisition of the area's construction and administration.<sup>33</sup> The idea that reserves harmed the city, prevented modernity and cleanliness, and were impossible to improve, enabled bureaucrats, local businessmen, and hiring firms to act on their agendas.<sup>34</sup> It is also interesting to note that the rationale behind colonial gentrification rested on concerns of land use, which exemplified new urban problems. The anxieties of the modern city in Canada parallel Foucault's "town phenomenon." Both instances involve urban circulation on the grounds of public health and well-being for a privileged population at the expense of others. Governmentality arises from racialized inclusion/exclusion, and rests upon the need for a healthy society amidst urban problems. Foucault's theory also applies, because Canadian municipal colonialism is an ongoing process, and continued to take place during his time. By this, I turn my attention towards Tina Loo's "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Canada," which is about Halifax's urban renewal program in the 1960s. Under the pretenses postwar welfare, which increased state responsibility for improving the human condition, renewal resulted in the dislocation of Halifax's black community of Africville.<sup>35</sup> The city's "welfare problem" made state power more subtle, like an invisible sovereign. This involved many different groups of people and stakeholders such as civil rights

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<sup>31</sup> Stanger-Ross, Jordan, "Municipal Colonialism in Vancouver," 542.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 558.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 558.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 545.

<sup>35</sup> Loo, Tina, "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada," abstract.

organizations and housing experts to propel the image of a good-natured state.<sup>36</sup> The story of Africville demonstrates that welfare governmentality involves many factors and stakeholders, but results, sometimes unintentionally, in a power over the integrity of certain minority communities.

My comparison between Foucault and Canadian municipal colonialism strengthens my argument about the true subtleness of state power and racialized exclusion. The rationale behind governmentality in Canadian cities emphasize the invisibility of the “settler sovereign,” which operates on ideas of modern and liberal progressivism. One aspect of progressive control exercises itself through regulating the circulation of disease, poverty, and social disorder in an enclosed space, using city bureaucrats and police for enforcement. However, this does not equate to being successful, which complicates Foucault’s analysis. Efforts to remove First Nations populations from cities, such as Vancouver in the 1860s mostly failed, due to a resistance of a colonial society which underpinned them, and mixed-race relations between white men and indigenous women.<sup>37</sup> The failure to extend authority over reserves was accentuated by instances of more subtle indigenous resistance, such as living both an urban and Aboriginal life, and reversing the hegemony of municipal colonizers.<sup>38</sup> Stanger-Ross also argues that municipal power could extend only so far to reserves, because the land within the reserves were not clearly subdivided and marked, thus many occupants remained unseen by the colonial gaze.<sup>39</sup> Efforts by Indian Affairs to maintain control over Kahnawake’s subdivisions were unsuccessful, due to the

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Perry, Adele, *On the Edge of Empire*, 123.

<sup>38</sup> Stanger-Ross, Jordan, “Municipal Colonialism in Vancouver,” 574.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 569.

magnitude of work and money to complete the project.<sup>40</sup> Compared to Foucauldian counter-conduct, this proves that the urban population is a new “problem” in itself, as multiple, varied, and sometimes combative. This also demonstrates that Canada’s history of colonialism is complicated, and those who faced racial exclusion often resisted in direct or subtle means.

To situate the Foucauldian town and Canadian urban history as a comparative analysis allows for making significant connections. Foucault’s concept of circulation effectively poses questions about the consequences that arise from urban renewal in cities like Vancouver or Halifax. Who is becomes excluded as a result, and how does this power come back to the state? What processes or social values justify these colonialist processes? This is why Gramsci’s hegemony is a significant analytical framework to provide a further understanding for these crucial problems. For example, knowing what hegemony means, gives historians a better grasp to account for the justifications behind the actions of those in power. To study colonialism within Canadian cities demonstrates a relationship between Foucault’s governmentality and hegemony. Finally, James Scott’s legibility effectively demonstrates the mechanisms in which urban powerholders construct their city, control circulation, and eliminate the miasmas at hand. Applying Gramsci or Scott also shows that while historians can make important conclusions about Canadian municipal colonialism through Foucault, this oftentimes creates more questions at the same time.

While it is beneficial to engage with Foucauldian and other analytics of power, using case studies helps to situate Foucault into real-life contexts to, and raise ongoing social issues. This is where the concept of public healthcare in cities as antecedents to racialized exclusion comes into

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<sup>40</sup> Rueck, Daniel “Commons, Enclosure, and Resistance in Kahnawake Mohawk Territory,” 379.

play. As I have demonstrated, circulation and governmentality can be applied to many instances. Despite obvious differences, there is a strong resemblance between Foucault's account of the plague, and the smallpox case of British Columbia. Similar situations arose in Vancouver in the 1920s to exclude indigenous communities through the agenda of urban rejuvenation and beautification. Applying Foucault to these circumstances, explains the power mechanisms at hand to control new urban problems. However, Canadian municipal colonialism complicates Foucauldian thought at the same time, because it unsettles subtle racial power structures. Urban circulation and governmentality create new problems of racialized exclusion in Canadian history. However, it is not enough to simply incite new questions, but to also consider the deep-rooted history of hegemonic mentalities in Canada which governed urban planning and renewal. Connecting historical theory to case studies raises new queries, and it is up to scholars to unsettle themselves in particular situations when required.

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