Chapter 8
Anticolonialism, Labor, and the Pedagogies of Community Unionism: The Case of Hotel Workers in Canada[1]

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> The proposed economic solution of the Negro problem in Africa and America has turned the thoughts of Negroes toward a realization of the fact that the modern white laborer of Europe and America has the key to the serfdom of black folk, in his support of militarism and colonial expansion. He is beginning to say to these workingmen that, so long as black laborers are slaves, white laborers cannot be free. Already there are signs in South Africa and the United States of the beginning of understanding between the two classes.
>
> (W.E.B. DuBois: *The Negro* – 1915, pp. 145–146)

> Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.
>
> (Karl Marx: *Capital Volume 1* – 1867/1990, p. 414)

8.1 Introduction

In Toronto (Canada) today, hotel workers have turned a new page in their own lives but they may also have begun to turn a new page in the collective life of the trade union movement. They are organizing, and in Canada, these efforts may represent a movement of distinction: at the center of a coalition of largely female and largely immigrant workers of color, an increasingly coherent and effective form of community/labor organizing has moved north to Canada from the United States and taken root.

Here I explore one of a growing number of examples in which the logics of race, gender, and class – so often kept isolated from each other as practical, social, political, and economic questions – converge with rare clarity. It is an example of a moment of undeniable possibility in which, what Raymond Williams (1977) referred to as "commitment" is overcome by powerful "alignments" of subaltern forces (pp. 199–205).

In order to better understand these events and their potential significance, in this chapter I draw on and explore questions emerging from *anticolonial* thought going back to foundational texts in the tradition. The colonization process, in the sense developed in this chapter, describes the lived complex of race, gender, and class reproduction as well as resistance across individual, group, and community practice

A. Kempf (ed.), *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in the US and Canada*,

and eventually broader societal forms. The contradictions of the *colonized experience* and the development it describes, then, are assessed as a potential unifying analytic term for understanding the confluence of specific forms of race–gender–class alienation, exploitation, and oppression but one emerging out of a tradition in which race and racism have particular "salience" to draw on the term used by Kempf in Chapter One to this book. This perspective challenges certain streams within postcolonial thought as either premature and nostalgic: premature or nostalgic in the context of the argument in this chapter in the sense that the colonizing process is viewed as inherent to the functioning of late capitalism rooted in race, gender, and class divisions.

I begin by reflecting on particular elements of anticolonialist thinking, building on the tradition which admits that colonial relations are developed within the nation-state as well as between nation-states and arguing that analysis of collective action must be central. Following this I turn to a detailed consideration of organized labor's uneven past and present in terms of interracial unity: a past that, as we will see, includes active racist overtures, actions, and failures to act as well as significant periods of progressive "alignment" and solidarity. A key, contemporary form of the latter, which I then explore, is a form of union organizing called *community unionism* which may come the closest to (re-)realizing the potential of a anticolonial stance within the Canadian labor movement's present. Following this I introduce, outline, and then discuss the *Hotel Workers' Rising* and Community Benefit Agreement campaigns currently underway (at the time of writing) in Toronto; campaigns undertaken by the workers of color that overwhelmingly make up the hotel services labor force of Toronto. The key question for workers of color and the labor movement is whether community unionism offers a return to the interspersed periods of progressive unity or alternatively represents an under-realized ideal, ratifying the less progressive trajectory of the labor movement's history in which it, not infrequently, served as a type of "middleman" for maintaining race divisions and intra-nation state colonialization. The backdrop of these activities is, of course, the contradictory process of an accelerated economic apartheid supporting the separation of political interests through sectarian recolonization, and its challenger: a pedagogy of anticolonialist social movement building. As I suggest, this is a pedagogy that may contain the potential to invigorate organized labor's progressive impulse, if not the path of its future with regards to questions at the confluence of class, gender, and race. It is a pedagogy through which one of the most potent forces for social change within and beyond capitalism – a racially united union movement – must confront a troubling past, and *learn* and *relearn* an alternative way of constructing itself. It is a pedagogy that, for Toronto hotel workers, necessarily must march from the "*darkened* back stairs" and hallways of the industry, through the fair-skinned lobbies and out into the streets to claim its rightful place in a united house of labor.

Necessarily presumed in this analysis, due to space, is an expansive notion of pedagogy. A pedagogy of anticolonialism for the labor movement entails a broad understanding of learning that takes in the full range of individual and collective developmental practices. Thus, organized educational offerings can be included,[2]

though the style of campaign we see amongst hotel workers in Toronto and throughout North America barely draws on it at all. In the case we will explore here, rather the most important pedagogy of all, is "campaign pedagogy": learning in everyday life, amidst new and continuing organizational forms of hotel workers' own doing. Just as important in registering this broad notion of pedagogy, however, is that it inherently rests on the possibility of radical change. In other words, it is not a pedagogy of adaptation, but of transformation. The term pedagogy in this sense is linked to an ontological worldview – i.e., a *dialectical* worldview – that presumes change even where conventional analysis and common sense register stasis; a point that, as we will see, emerges as an important feature defining much anticolonialist thought as well. In this chapter, therefore, we explore the following questions: What might a broader pedagogy of anticolonialism look like in terms of organized labor and community unionism; and, do the Toronto *Hotel Workers Rising* and Community Benefit Agreement campaigns articulate such principles?

In fact, as articulated in the Introduction, the entire volume is based on this more profound ontological claim that change is fundamental to social practice and the organizing and reorganizing of social arrangements. In short, the colonial only emerges in analysis through the existence of the anticolonial. However, if the "breaching" hypothesis of this book is to have value in terms of the content of *this chapter*, it is essential to make a contribution to our understanding by looking at colonialism–anticolonialism as not only a situation or state of affairs but as a specific social mechanism of *inclusion* in relations of domination which begins but cannot end with issues of racialized differences.

8.2 Context

As further context to this chapter, it is worthwhile to take a moment to situate such concerns in the reality of, what in earlier work, I have described as the "evisceration of working-class communities" under advanced global capitalism (Sawchuk 2007). Briefly, at issue is the current status or social health of the diverse working classes, but in particular the segment of the working classes that faces the triple-edged sword of a racialized, a gendered, as well as a viciously classed life. A host of sources have recently documented in agonizing detail the forces of dissolution and fragmentation of working-class communities generally (e.g., Swift 1995, Forrester 1998, Putnam 2000, Ehrenreich 2002), however issues of racialization have figured in such texts in secondary ways. In part, this gap in working-class studies motivates this chapter, and demands a turn toward anticolonialist thought, rooted as it is in the salience of race. My point is that under conditions prevalent in advanced industrialized countries around the globe, it may not be hard to understand that amongst the general declining conditions and atomization that must be considered the hallmarks of advanced capitalism, there is also growing internal divisions rooted in gender, ethnic, and racial differences that play an increasingly determinant role, one of

the most obvious recent examples being anti-immigrant sentiment across North America (e.g., Chacón and Davis 2006) and Europe (e.g., Layhay 2004) that implicate the native elites as well as the (white and non-white) native working classes. Taken together, the results are new levels of economic isolation, secured by an internal colonialism, resulting in the social fragmentation of a potentially united, diverse working-class majority.

Solidifying and in turn intensifying racialization as well as gendering processes within working-class community, however, are the institutions of paid work. As Creese (2007) has recently confirmed:

> Pay equity and employment equity legislation, for example, have been enacted in many jurisdictions across the country [yet] racialization remains central to the organization of gendered labour markets, and white men continue to monopolize choice jobs and earn a premium compared to other groups. (Creese 2007, p. 192)

Moreover, racialization processes have an interwoven but distinctive relationship to immigration patterns in Canada, as Creese goes on to say:

> The "imagined nation" of Canada was soon embedded in images of whiteness in spite of the continued vitality of First Nations communities and the fact that immigration always included some people from outside Europe, including, by the late nineteenth century, significant populations whose origins were in Africa and Asia (Li 2003).… By the dawn of the twenty-first century, then, it might be argued that although the imagined nation, with associated material structures of privilege, has been destabilized and complicated by recent trends, it retains a white centre that is evident in the labour market and elsewhere. (Creese 2007, pp. 194–195)

Das Gupta's (1996) work expands this point: "Racism is the effect of rather than the intention to cause deprivation to people of colour" (p. 14). That is, racist outcomes are not simply the result of institutional dynamics of education or the labor market; nor can it be placed neatly on the shoulders of employer and human resource (HR) practices. Each of these play a crucial role (e.g., Henry 1999); however, the effects are cumulative and include the functioning of social networks amongst workers (e.g. Vallas 2001) and dynamics of inclusion–exclusion in and through unions themselves.

Our turn, in this chapter, toward the role of unions and union organizing is both a crucial and under-assessed one. We know, for example, that an analysis of subordination of the working classes within this state of advanced cultural and economic evisceration is incomplete without recognition of the points of resistance. This chapter begins from the idea that the capacities of diverse working-class groups, particularly though not necessarily exclusively unionized ones, can and still do stubbornly resist these forces of evisceration particularly where there remain vestiges of social stabilization (e.g., a strong welfare state, strong labor laws, workers' political parties, and significant social capital in the form of family and community). Practically speaking, at the center of this claim are instances of the accumulation of scarce discretionary time, the pooling of scarce resources, and collective action which positively expresses the mix of subaltern standpoints. Indeed, the hopes of working-class struggle depend on emerging relationships of "alignment," a term flagged earlier, in which all are equal, none are more equal than

others, and deep-seated impulses toward economic and social justice inform new structures of solidarity.

8.3 Reading Anticolonialist Thought: Setting the Stage for Understanding Hotel Worker Campaigns

Addressed as a political, psychological, as well as an existential phenomenon, anticolonialist thought is already on solid footing in classical works including those of Fanon, Memmi, Césairé, and possibly Freire as well. However, taking Sartre's introductory comments to Memmi's classic *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965) as a case in point, one of the roles of this chapter is to make an invitation out of Sartre's constructive critique: "The whole difference between us arises perhaps because he sees a situation where I see a system" (Sartre in Memmi 1965, p. xxv). True, Memmi's analysis in that specific piece of work does not necessarily lend itself to understanding a social system – if by system Sartre is indicating patterns subject to motion and change – but rather a situation or snapshot of the colonial–anticolonial contract, refracted through experience of a specific space, place, and time.

Having noted this, however, the specific contribution of this chapter lies in continuing to build on, apply, and move out from classical colonial relations of "mother country" and "colony," to embrace the colonization processes actively proceeding within countries across the globe but in particular in advanced capitalist countries such as Canada. This turns our attention toward the general approach advocated in Blauner (1969)[3] in his studies of Black social movements in the United States of the 1960s where he notes:

> [T]he utility of a distinction between colonization as a process and colonialism as a social, economic, and political system. It is the experience of colonization that Afro-Americans share with many of the non-white people of the world. But this subjugation has taken place in a societal context that differs in important respects from the situation of "classical colonialism." … Viewing our domestic situation as a special form of colonization outside a context of a colonial system [explains] some of the dilemmas and ambiguities. (p. 393)

Dilemmas, ambiguities, and, as we will see, historical contradictions of this intrastate colonial project will be explored in terms of the role of the labor movement specifically, but first it is necessary to take a closer look at classical anticolonial literature and its relationship to levels of analysis, collective action, and internal colonialism.

8.3.1 Collective Responses and Alternative Forms of Social Organization

Perhaps the first theoretically articulated breach in the colonial contract is found in pathbreaking works appearing following World War II. And, if there is a particularly defining feature in this regard, it is in the analysis of the relational identities

of the colonizer and the colonized. One of the core articulations of Memmi (1965) is that there is no partial escape for the colonizer. There is, in other words, simply no relevance to the distinctions between good, bad, well-meaning, alienated, disenchanted, or disaffected colonizer. That is, on the *individual level* there is no solution to the contradictions of colonialized relations; virtually all individual forms of response feed it, some, in fact most, directly so. Rather, what the classical scholarship shows us is that there is a need to discover, rediscover, articulate, and develop analysis and understanding of the minutiae of *collective responses*, inclusive of, but not limited to, overt revolutionary action. In the case of this chapter, our focus is turned to the collective responses of labor organizing – yet another form of politics carried out by other means – through the lens of re-colonial–anticolonial processes within the advanced capitalist nation-state.

To move deeper into an analysis of "systems" and away from "situations" in terms of the re-colonial moment that marks the ongoing fruition of intra-state or internal colonialism, we must look toward the collective possibilities through which the relational identities of the colonizer–colonized change; identities of not simply workers of color and the ruling elite but those produced in the still disproportionately white, formally organized labor movement as well. But how is this achieved? The focus of this article is on how this was achieved through one particular form of political–economic organizing – unionization. Inherently challenging liberal relativism and regressive forms of identity politics, this argument builds from the basic notion that social standpoints matter, drawing on the marxist perspective that the standpoint of the oppressed, given its lived closeness to the contradictory mechanisms of the social and economic system, offer the greatest potential for claims to truth, where we understand claims to truth as rooted in the experience of interlocking contradictions that drive historical change. Dehumanization is a process that is not, as Memmi (1971) argues in *Dominated Man*, isolated to what can be always best described as the re-colonialization–anticolonization process: dehumanization remains central to class and gender as well as anti-ethnic violence (e.g., anti-Semitism). In this sense, all power relations make use of it for reproduction, and scholars like Memmi, as well as Said, Fanon, Freire, and others, are aligned with the tradition of radical scholarship that shows how the minds of dominator and dominated are intertwined. But it is still worth, once again, pointing out – as a means of situating how traditions of radical feminism and marxism, as well as labor organizing, fit into these concerns – that, make no mistake, it is the anticolonialist critique that has most clearly articulated the racist dimensions of the dehumanization dynamics. The anticolonialist critique points out, for example, the unique possibility of *individual* mobility in class systems given the absence of many of the embodied, racialized differences which tends to restrict the segregationist capacities of a purely class-based system of social hierarchy. That is, individual members of the white, male working class have a unique potential to "pass" and in isolated cases to become a member of the ruling elite; a potential that under patriarchy and colonial systems is denied workers of color; an achievement, in fact, built upon both continued racial as well as class and gender hierarchy.

More generally, it follows here that the standpoint of those suffering multiple oppressions offers the greatest potential of all to generate claims to truth through collective action, and it is this perspective that offers the possibility of the most dangerous forms of praxis. But what should not follow from this is the assumption that knowledge emerges in the absence of countervailing forms of social organization. While certainly the academy, as a whole, may be one of the last places to look for knowledge of this kind, we should not expect to find it where fragmentation reigns and culturally or materially stable communities that positively express subordinate standpoints collectively are absent.

The point here is that if colonialism–anticolonialism is to be understood, in the first instance, as more than the individual contradictions of lived experiences (of both colonizer and colonized), and in the second, as more than a macro political–historical analysis; it is perhaps particularly in the realm of collective practices – that is collective countervailing forces of social organization – that this is to be achieved. Marx's notion, of "ascending from the abstract to the concrete," his 11th thesis on Feurerbach, and Freire's (1970) extrapolation of these dialectical principles of *radical praxis* to the pedagogical process *writ large* may be particularly relevant in this regard. But more to the point, what is needed are the very kinds of analysis available in this collection, and elsewhere, that tailor, select, and apply an approach to reveal the re-colonialization and anti-colonization process of new forms of collective resistance. At subject in this chapter is just one such instance: an attempt at selectively thinking through and applying anticolonial concepts to better understand what Galabuzi (2006) has recently demonstrated to be Canada's own "economic apartheid," a system which his analysis shows is clearly expanding rather than contracting. Like many in this collection, I take it as given that colonialism is defined generally as a system of imposition and domination, though I go on to indicate that a definition cannot stop there: a full definition must also include points of resistance, and in particular it must include countervailing social organization and collective responses to injustice.

8.3.2 Internal Re-colonialization in Advanced Capitalist Countries

As has been understood for sometime, capitalism and colonialism are deeply intertwined. They develop and draw on each other even if, by some definitions (precapitalist), colonial relations are detectable much earlier. Over the last century, however, we can say with confidence that capitalism must maintain its grip in the metropoles, but that it cannot simply leave imperialist outposts as raw (human and material) resource suppliers and must instead draw these former outposts deeper into the direct capital accumulation processes themselves (hence, the growth of sub-Saharan, Southeast Asian, and Pacific-rim manufacturing, for example). So too, in mutually constituting fashion, colonial relations must also continue to expand, to maintain existing colonial relations internationally while exporting and intensifying

these relations within the metropoles. Colonialism, in other words, must be expanded and established within as well as between all nation-states, as Loomba's review of the status of postcolonial scholarship (1998) begins to indicate:

> "Colonialism" is not just something that happens from outside a country or a people, not just something that operates with the collusion of forces inside but a version of it can be duplicated from within. … Many people living in both once-colonized and once colonizing countries are still subject to the oppressions put into place by colonialism. (Loomba 1998, pp. 12–13)

Building on this, it seems clear that at least in terms of empirical demonstrations of re-colonialization–anti-colonialization within the heart of Western empire, our understanding is incomplete. And, in furthering such examinations, it is important to continue to return to questions raised in the seminal scholarship of the anticolonial tradition. If, for example, re-colonialism–anticolonialism does not require the formal markers of foreign powers of an imperialist national state, but rather revolves around more generalized notions of legitimate belonging, membership, difference, and superiority (Principe 2004) *within* a nation-state, then it is necessary to rethink the concrete nature of these internal relationships.

In the case of this chapter, the analysis traces this mutually constituting evolution of capitalism and colonialism within Canada. The focus here is on the service sector in Canada which increasingly defines the economic activity of this and other advanced capitalist countries,[4] and more specifically the hospitality sector which also continues to grow. The discussion revolves around workers of color, many newly immigrated, all making among the lowest wages the economy has to offer, delivering services in some of Canada's most luxuriously appointed hotels.

As I have already begun to show here, there is value in regularly returning to foundational scholars in pushing toward new empirical projects, and in this context we can further clarify the work in this chapter. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965) Memmi outlines: "Colonial racism is built from three major ideological components: one, the gulf between the culture of the colonialist and the colonized; two, the exploitation of these differences for the benefit of the colonialist; three, the use of these supposed differences as standards of absolute fact" (p. 71). We are all a product of our place and time which, in turn, conditions our preoccupations; and hence, according to my own preoccupations in this chapter, I feel it is important to inquire into whether or not and/or to what degree Memmi's original points are relevant for going forward. To take this key example, I will argue Memmi's overall claims remain relevant, though I test them against the context of both twenty-first century, intra-state colonial relations, and more specifically, in terms of the choices facing the Canadian labor movement to either foment its role in our colonial past in relation to workers of color, or alternatively depart toward a potentially new, liberating project of structurally conjoining the political economic tools of unionization to the capacities of communities of color vis-à-vis the model known as "community unionism."

Likewise, going back in history as with Memmi, I ask whether or not and/or to what degree are some key claims of Fanon to be seen as relevant. Turning toward his chapter on national culture in *Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon 1963), for example,

we see that he is correct to implicate the importance of the active creation of new political cultures. Cultural history, in this sense, is central in Fanon's approach. However, as others have pointed out generally (e.g., Said 1978), there are important limitations here. In terms of this chapter, we are compelled to expand and apply Fanon's thinking, and for this we can benefit from a specific example summarized by his allusion to the "doctrine of Cartierism." Specifically, we find that such a doctrine can be translated nicely to the *intrastate* colonial relations as well. In Fanon's original presentation of Cartier's dilemma we see a series of relevant questions drawn into view: how much to feed and support the colony, how much to maintain the colonial population balanced against the more primary needs of the so-called mother country?

Applying the questions to the topic of this chapter, we could find ourselves speaking of the Canadian (and Foreign Direct Investment) capital as the "mother country" which must be constantly constructed and reconstructed, materially as well as symbolically, to include largely white, "middle classes" of professional groups and petite bourgeoisie who administer and those segments of the white working-class allies which are essential to splitting its primary opposition. The crystalline examples of internal colonization of aboriginal nations in North America (including Mexico) may be notable in this regard, as will be the equally clear example of the developmental trajectory of the US slave economy from antebellum, reconstruction, and "Jim Crow" through to the present (Genovese 1974; Blauner 2001). But it is just as essential, as I shall try to show here, that the internal colonial project and in particular its breaching finds expression within a discussion of unionization and the development of the labor movement; a matter which becomes as obvious as it ever has been in today's North American "free trade era" where we have seen the impoverishment of all segments of the working classes of not one, not two, but all three of the NAFTA signatory countries (e.g. Chacón and Davis 2006). Clearly, the modern re-colonial project has had to increasingly turn its attentions inward, just as the anticolonial project must as well.

8.4 Organized Labor, Re-colonialism–Anticolonialism: Community Unionism as a Departure?

The focus on union organizing may, in some quarters of postcolonial and anti-colonial scholarship, raise eyebrows amongst those who question the capacity to remake the master's house with the master's tools. It may be useful in this regard to preempt questions on the European origins of the organized labor movement as it exists in countries like Canada, by way of engaging in a discussion of the possibility for so noble (and so regularly under-applied) an idea as "universal labor solidarity." There is virtually no avoiding the fact that an adequate account of actual trade union practice historically represents a contradictory trajectory. Clearly, critical labor history in North America has shown the movement to have served both a figurative and sometimes viciously active role as "colonial administrator," deeply

intertwined with the reproduction of racism (e.g. Spero and Harris 1931; Jones 1992; Hutchinson 1995; Heron 1996; Horowitz 1997; Brecher 1997; Huntley and Montgomery, 2004). But as Huntley and Montgomery point out: "[U]nions were theaters of conflict *and* of mobilization against racial discrimination" (2004, p. 1). Indeed, Chacón and Davis (2006) indicate that radical opportunities emerged during the first few decades of the twentieth century when both the International Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies) and newly formed Committee for Industrial Organizations (CIO)[5] were engaged in what would be understandable as serious breaches of the internal, colonial order by organizing effectively across racial lines, though not without considerable resistance from within organized labor which, in effect, reasserted their conservative status as both a source of shock troops (e.g. the Teamsters Union in California in the early twentieth century) and effective contributor to the overall administration of internal colonization:

> Under these circumstances, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) emerged and split from the paralyzed AFL to transform the militancy of a growing sector of workers into a mass strike movement for industrial unionism, driven by masses of unskilled workers. Communist and socialist workers provided leadership and a class-conscious, multiracial approach to organizing. First- and second-generation immigrants were the backbone of the new movement, a reality reflected by the fact that CIO unions "aimed to meet workers on their ethnic, or racial, ground and pull them into a self-consciously common culture that transcended those distinctions" [Milkman 2000]. Mass militancy, often imbued with socialist ideology, created new confidence among workers to confront and overturn the prejudices of the past. The leading role many immigrants played in the rising union movement – as well as the class consciousness that emerged through workers' collective struggles – smashed the putative segregation that had divided most workers on the basis of ethnic origins. The CIO represented the apex of working-class power, which redefined class relations and shifted the balance of power in U.S. politics. (pp. 273–274)

Indeed, prior to the CIO's rise, there were other key examples in North America: some independent multiracial–multiethnic labor organizations such as the "Japanese–Mexican Labor Association" (circa 1903), but many others linked to the work of the Wobblies, as Hall (2001) notes:

> [The] Wobbly press frequently addressed the commonality of labor experience amongst white, Asian, Hispanic and African-American workers. Whether reporting on the difficult working experience of Mexican construction laborers in San Diego, the exploitation of white, Chinese and Japanese farm workers in California's central valleys, or the plight of impoverished white and African-American loggers in Louisiana's pine forest, the Wobbly press sought to encourage workers to see past race to their common struggle against the employer who controlled the means of production. (pp. 58–59)

Seeing "past race," in these terms, encompassed a change in both white workers and workers of color, but it also meant an additional commitment amongst the latter who faced racism both within the labor movement and within capital–labor relations themselves.

Nevertheless, it was in particular regions, economic sectors, and movements in both Canada and the United States – in the form of CIO and IWW organizing combined with the internal organizing efforts of communities of color themselves, as well as the socialist and communist parties – that notions of "universal labor

solidarity" were being both actively constructed, as well as resisted, within union ranks.[6] These were times, as Chacón and Davis (2006) argue, when issues of race, immigration, and the future of organized labor took front-stage, facing-off against the all-too-easily mobilized "nativist" impulses (and resources, including those offered by the state) of the white working, middle, and ownership classes. It was during these periods of collective action that it became increasingly clear racial unity defined the transformative potential of the working class as whole:

> Inter-ethnic and international class solidarity, or lack thereof, has been a determinant of the progression, inertia, or regression of the [labor] movement. When nationalist or chauvinist sentiments are strong, the working class is weak, demonstrating the deep penetration of ruling-class ideology into working-class consciousness. (Chacón and Davis 2006, p. 268)

On this matter, Brecher's historical analysis of racial divisions in the American labor movement in *Strike!* (1997) is even more clear: "[White labor's] sense of 'privilege' – stoked by the prevalent racism introduced into labor relations and immigration policy – fueled an anti-immigration disposition that strangled multi-racial solidarity in the crib of early industrialization" (p. 269).

But lest we bury the corpse prematurely, in Canada challenges to the disproportionately white, male labor movement continued (see Lopes and Thomas 2006). First, rooted in changes to (provincial and then federal) legislation, unionization of public sector workers (a sector where there was approximate gender, though not racial, parity)[7] brought about important changes beginning in the 1960s. In this context, white women began to finally experience some success in access to the labor movement including leadership positions. Likewise, beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, we saw the structural conditions for an analogous pressure vis-à-vis the rise of the service sector: the lower tier of which had become the home of a disproportionate number of (both male and female) workers of color. Indeed, over the last 2 decades organizing in this sector has accounted for the stabilization of the union density. As Galabuzi's recent analysis indicates, unionization is a "serious non-governmental option to deal with the income gap between Canadians of colour and those of European origin" (Galabuzi 2006, p. 97). Though workers of color remain underrepresented in unionized jobs,[8] this pattern appears to be changing. And, it is through such changes that organized labor's own internal, colonial contribution, is once again being seriously challenged from among its own ranks as it was in the early twentieth century.

It is relevant to note, however, that the impetus for this change has not been through organized education of existing membership (though this goes on), but through a new pedagogy of organizing and social movement building (e.g. Russo and Banks 1996; cf. de Turberville 2004). The relatively recent emergence of a body of research on labor and community coalitions and "community unionism" speaks to these issues directly, and can be argued to be a new code word for organizing immigrant and nonimmigrant workers of color.

As we see below, generally speaking, the term community unionism has come to be defined as the deep integration of labor union and community needs, strategies, and activities combining traditional work-based issues with issues of community sustainability, as quality of life, and civic engagement. What comes onto

the bargaining table, for example, are issues such as quality of work life alongside the quality of community life and social inclusion involving issues of public services such as youth training, transportation, and child-care. These are issues that necessarily require employer and union as well as community and governmental engagement. Beyond this, however, the conceptualization of community unionism becomes quite blurry. In 1998, Tufts, drawing explicitly on research with hotel workers in Toronto in fact, described the concept as "embryonic" (see also Nissen 2004), though in the last 5 years major changes appear to be on the horizon (cf. Tufts 2006a). Two recent efforts have attempted to build an expanded theoretical framework for community unionism; the first, based on comparison between Australia and the United States, is Tattersall and Reynolds (2007); and the second is Frundt's (2005) theoretical synthesis which focuses on the potential for international solidarity. It is worth noting that by far the bulk of the available literature on community unionism is American. This emerges directly out of race relations and a particularly intense sense of crisis in US urban centers. Nevertheless issues of community and union cooperation and community unionism are now rising in importance in Canadian cities as well.

Several community unionism contributions stand out, however, with regards to my interest here in exploring re-colonialism–anti-colonialism. A key starting point in this regard is the historical review offered by Kelley (1999). Community is confirmed as an essential starting point for workers of color for many of the reasons indicated above. Other examples of contemporary research from the United States includes Kemper's (2006) study of relations between Navajo tribes and the Laborers' International Union of North America, whereas Worthen and Haynes (2003) focus on workers of color in the Chicago area partnering with labor and the Chicago Interfaith Committee. Both are supplemented by the work of Needleman (1998). In Canada, Choudry and Shragge (2007) have produced a groundbreaking study in their investigation of community and labor cooperation involving immigrant, migrant, as well as undocumented workers in Montreal. What becomes clear is that labor's mobilization resources and tools may not be well suited at present and that new organizational forms may be required; a point underscored by Cranford and Ladd (2003) who focus on racialized groups working through temp agencies, on contract and unemployed who seem to benefit from community strategies that bare only a faint, familial resemblance to traditional labor movement organizational forms.

This turn toward "community" in "community–labor" coalitions is significant, and in this regard it is essential to recognize that workers of color, if they are to successfully take their rightful place as a leadership component of labor movement, begin from a standpoint of cultural–racial outsiders in a way that whites, though hardly homogeneous themselves, simply are not. This community unionism approach thus entails the question of either cultural assimilation or the building of a fundamentally new culture for labor. In other words, what is at stake is more than simply seeing more black, brown, or yellow faces throughout the structure of the labor movement, although this would obviously signal other important changes. Rather it is about recognizing that the culture of the Canadian labor movement

reflects particular racialized communities already, and that a new labor movement must evolve new hybrid cultural forms. And thus, the crucial question becomes whether the labor movement engages in a colonization process of its very own, simply reproducing hierarchical racial relations in new intra-class forms or takes an alternative route. And, in answering this question the basic litmus test here would be to what degree *both* the community and the labor movement engage in mutual change and development.

8.5 The Hotel Worker Rising and Community Benefits Campaigns

Against the backdrop I have developed above, this section provides an introduction to the collective action amidst the ongoing processes and the resultant racial economic apartheid that have produced internal colonialism within Canada today. To understand it in terms of discussions of unionization and organized labor, it is necessary to provide a basic profile of the sectoral context from which it emerges.

The hotel industry forms a major proportion of retail services in both Canada and the United States, and is growing both in profitability and employment levels. The industry has seen accelerated ownership turnover in recent years and has become increasingly dominated by large conglomerates that operate internationally including Marriott, Hilton, Starwood, and Hyatt which, in addition to flagship hotels, run an even broader set of others operating under different names including those familiar in Canadian urban centers, such as Holiday Inn, Embassy Suites, Crowne Plaza, and Sheraton to name only a few. According to *Smith Travel Research*, 2006, in fact, the hotel industry recently broke a record in consolidations in the United States. *The Wall Street Journal* estimated in late 2005 that the coming years would show record profits in the industry, and indeed it has. In 2006, for example, the Marriott group experienced a 100% growth in net income during one of its quarters to lead the pack (though not by much). Fuelling the quarterly gains seen in the industry, however, is not increased consumption, but rather both growing room rates and most importantly, work intensification. The excerpt below gives us a glimpse into the working lives upon which these forms of economic "gain" rest in Toronto specifically.

> Every morning shortly after 6 a.m., Althea Porter leaves her Mississauga home for a trek into the core of Toronto, where she works at a large Holiday Inn whose shape begs comparison to a wedding cake. She makes up 16 rooms each day, and is joined, on busy days, by some two dozen other room attendants. If everything's going smoothly, it should take a veteran attendant like Porter about 30 minutes to get a room ready for the next guest. That means stripping the sheets, replacing the bedding, cleaning the coffee pot and glasses, swabbing the bathroom, collecting the garbage, replenishing the soap, towels and stationery, and generally straightening up the place. If everything isn't going smoothly – if there's a foyer full of conventioneers waiting for rooms or if Porter has to scour the hotel looking for supplies the day becomes a race against time. She routinely skips breaks and wolfs down her lunch. "Sometimes," Porter says, "people don't even take lunch.… When you

> have families in the summer, then you have rooms that are really trashed. … Those are the worst times for room attendants." And over all, their jobs have gotten a lot tougher in the past year or two. Responding to competitive pressure, many hotel chains have laid on splendid queen- or even king-sized mattresses, plush duvets, extra pillows and other goodies for guests. "They call it 'signature service,' where everything is well done," says Canedo [another room attendant]. "You put out the amenities so that when the guest enters the room, it's a heavenly place to stay, a second home. We do that every day." Problem is, the attendants are still only getting 30 minutes per room. And when the mattress is large and heavy, upwards of 50 kilograms, it's awkward to change the sheets. Because of that extra weight and the bulky new duvets, attendants are suffering back and shoulder injuries. "I don't mind serving the guests, but not when it affects my health," says Porter, who earns $14.68 per hour after 13 years in the industry. (Lorinc 2006, p. 1)

Most importantly, to establish not only the context but the significance of this research focus, the hotel industry employs over 1.5 million workers in North America (280,000 in Canada; 1.3 million in the United States), of whom approximately a quarter are housekeepers. Of these the vast majority are marginalized groups: women, people of color, immigrants, as well as single parents and welfare-to-work participants. In Toronto specifically, seven of ten local hotel workers are new Canadians, mostly from the Philippines, China, Sri Lanka, and South America. The average salary is $10.48 an hour, while the median housekeeper wage is $26,000 a year. In keeping with racial segmentation of the labor market, wages in the sector are among the lowest in the broader retail sector. On average as an occupational group, earnings in Canada and the United States place full-time workers below or marginally above the poverty line, though unionized housekeepers as subgroup just manage to top it.

The labor organization that represents the bulk of these workers is the recently amalgamated United Needletrades, Industrial Textile Employees–Hotel and Restaurant Employees (UNITE-HERE) union. According to a UNITE-HERE survey report "Creating Luxury, Enduring Pain" (2006),[9] basic "speed-up" as well as the increasing use of luxury amenities (all the way from heavier mattresses, triple-sheeting, exercise equipment to heavier amenities carts, coffeepots service, larger and harder to clean mirrors, and so on) has produced exhaustion and injuries. Light and severe sprains, back injuries, and bursitis are particularly prominent. In fact, statistically housekeeping work is now North America's most dangerous retail occupation.

It is against this backdrop of a specific occupational colony of racialized workers that the *Hotel Workers Rising* campaign was initiated. UNITE-HERE's goal established several years prior was to carry out massive, organized campaigns to boost union certification in the industry in both Canada and the United States simultaneously to create a critical mass of unionized workers in the industry. In Toronto alone, this strategy resulted in more than 30 specific hotel agreements up for renegotiation in 2006. Indeed, this plan entailed the synchronization of contract expiry dates across a series of US states as well as the province of Ontario to realize an aggressive bargaining agenda but to also kick-start a major membership drive in specific urban centers including Hawaii, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, and Toronto.

In Toronto, the *Hotel Workers Rising* campaign was built from a coalition of a range of over 30 community groups ranging from the Metropolitan United Church, Filipino, and various Latin American community organizations, women's groups,

the Social Planning Council of Toronto, as well as UNITE-HERE (Local 75). March 2007 was emblematic of the campaign. At the corner of King and Yonge Streets, workers demonstrated in celebration of their win in voting for unionization within UNITE-HERE Local 75. As one housekeeper at the rally said:

> We stood together and showed 1 King West that we wanted to be members of UNITE-HERE. … This is about our working conditions and it is also about us having a voice. We are the invisible workers who are making the hotel really successful but our concerns are being overlooked.[10]

Eventually assembling in front of Toronto City Hall, it is no coincidence that this example of class solidarity across racial and ethnic lines dovetailed with International Women's Day celebrations as well.

What may be of particular significance to our discussion here, however, is that the campaign has given rise to what in Canada is an inclusive *form* of union organizing amongst workers of color: the extension of labor relations to target gains and unify leadership in communities of color more broadly through what are called the establishment of "Community Benefit Agreements." The first such agreement in Canadian history has been established through the Woodbine Community Benefit Agreement currently being negotiated in light of the city's redevelopment of the former racetrack area. Its focus is on the quality of life, park creation, transit, day care, as well as local hiring from the North Etobicoke neighborhood in Toronto; an embattled and impoverished community of mostly nonwhite and immigrant groups in which, in addition, a significant number of Toronto housekeeping workers reside.

How then can we begin to understand the dynamics of these community unionism campaign efforts by drawing on questions raised earlier in the brief review of key elements of anticolonial thought? Does this campaign represent a breaching of the colonial contract? And, if so, the contract amongst whom exactly and how?

As Lorinc has accurately commented in his account of the Toronto campaign "[t]he people who make up your fancy hotel room are invisible, but powerful – now that they've realized they can put downtown economies through the wringer" (p. 1). Invisibility, in this sense, presumes a subject to whom something is "invisible," and here we see echoes of the social pre-construction of racial (and gendered) identities and mis-recognition that Fanon discusses drawing on his experiences amidst his medical training in France in *Black Skin White Masks* (1967).[11] If the systematic mis-recognition (or social construction and activation of racial subjectivities) of particular people and manufacturing invisibility is essential to the realization of colonial relations, here we can see an example of such relations in the heart of the Canadian economy. Just as easily we can see a challenge to these relations through an emerging form of collective action structured by the intersection of communities of color and organized labor against the backdrop of capitalist labor processes and control. Indeed, there can be little doubt that a type of partial breaching of the colonial contract may be evident in what has transpired to date. A city within a city, a colony subjected to the internal colonial processes of invisibility, has felt within itself a new measure of power.

However, this invisibility is not simply created on the basis of either a general interpersonal experience or on the scale of a city or nation-state; it is also created in

the institutionally specific context of the workplace which, in the case of the hotel industry, is a space of economic as well as social production and consumption. The hotel, as a site of economic production and consumption, is infused with a familiar pattern of what we can call front and back stairs labor (e.g. Adib and Guerrier 2003; Applebaum, Dresser and Hatton 2003; Park 2004; Adler and Adler 2004; Sherman 2005, 2007; Tufts 2006b). In the lobby, desk staff are disproportionately white and English-speaking, just behind them sit switchboard operators. And, on the back stairs, working through the bowels of the hotel are housekeepers and laundry and kitchen workers – disproportionately workers of color.

While unionization offers greater job security, better benefits, and higher wages in all industries in Canada (Zuberi 2006, 2007), the fact is that breaking through to unionization for these workers of color entails a double burden. First, is the difficulty and personal economic peril of organizing that any worker faces, though with even lower levels of material resources, a particularly heroic act for a housekeeper. Second, is the difficulty of breaking through into the structure of the labor movement itself as a cultural outsider. Thus, what becomes equally clear in discussions of invisibility and the re-colonialization process is that the labor movement once again comes face to face with its own, uneven history of interracial solidarity. As Chacón and Davis (2006, pp. 291–292) point out in their analysis of the labor movement's response to undocumented immigrant worker organizing efforts in the spring of 2006 in the United States. Union leaders there were just as likely to seek to curtail work stoppages, boycotts, and marches, aligning themselves in the process with the recolonization project.

8.6 Conclusions

> Black labor has historically played an interesting role, something akin to the irritant in the oyster that brings forward a pearl. (Fletcher 2007, p. 3)

Bill Fletcher Jr. has been a labor activist for virtually his entire adult life, engaged in, amongst other things, the vibrant period of black labor caucus and revolutionary black labor action organizing of the 1960s and 1970s. His comment points back toward a key issue we began with in this chapter which was the intertwined and mutually constituting nature of capitalism and colonialism. However, as we have seen, there is still much to be said on this relationship, but in these concluding remarks we may now be in a better position to link the overall argument presented in the chapter to the more pointed comments by Chacón and Davis cited earlier: "Inter-ethnic and international class solidarity, or lack thereof, has been a determinant of the progression, inertia, or regression of the [labor] movement." At the same time, such realizations can only be a beginning – a beginning which as we have seen has a long history. Indeed, Marx's comments on the emancipation of labor which were used to kick off this chapter give us a sense of how long this beginning has been. His observation, while rhetorically accurate, was analytically under-realized in terms of how "internal colonialism," as described by Loomba and Blauner above, has become one of the defining features of late capitalism. Likewise, the words of DuBois, though far more sensitive to the

relations of internal colonialization, nevertheless betrays an optimism for a solution that has proven far more difficult to realize than first imagined.

In both cases, key ideas emerging from classical anticolonial thought provide new insights for moving forward. And, they have fuelled discussion in this chapter in a number of ways. First, that this mutual parasitism of colonialism and capitalism can explain global imperial relations as well as local conditions of economic apartheid in the so-called First World. Second, that racialization, the production of its invisibility, and the mis-recognition of humanity it entails are central to the re-colonialization processes of internal colonialism in countries like Canada today. And finally, that there is a distinct need for further research on questions of collective action balanced with concerns for identity and personalized social experience within the recolonial–anticolonial process internal to advanced capitalist countries.

As one example of collective action under these conditions, we then turned to labor organizing. In this regard, we have discussed the labor movement's uneven history of interracial organizing: from periods of overt, self-defeating racist action, from other periods when the labor movement's activities could be characterized as offering a passive acceptance of the "nativist" impulses amongst its membership, all the way to progressive moments of the past and present including actions in the organizing traditions of the Wobblies, the early CIO, and, now, organizing through models of community unionism. However, contemporary, North American community unionism research has, in fact, revealed lingering contradictions in several, documented cases by exposing the difficulty in generating meaningful, sustained linkages between communities and organized labor where, as was noted, more often than not the term "communities" functions as a code word for communities of color.

The discussion here of the *Hotel Workers Rising* and associated campaigns is necessarily preliminary. It serves as a starting point only. Further research has begun to emerge and is forthcoming. However, it seems clear that campaigns such as *Hotel Workers Rising* give some indication that a progressive period in which the capacity to develop sustained linkages across all workers are being worked through as thoroughly as the most progressive historical periods in Canada. From the perspective adopted in this chapter, I simply conclude by saying that these challenges are ones which actively confront the types of question first raised by Memmi (1965) regarding the contradictory appeal and uncomfortable equivocation that always rests in the self-image of the colonizer. In this regard, organized labor must continue to challenge elements of its own history as an institution traditionally dominated by the white working-class and through which it has at times actively and passively played a "middleman" role in delivering the traditional benefits that capital has accrued by separating the working classes.

Notes

1. Research for this publication was funded by a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant: "Understanding Educational Capacity for Urban Community Unionism: Exploring the Developmental Foundation of a New Labour Relations Regime in Canada" (Grant #410–2007–863).
2. For a recent summary of organized equity education in Canadian unions see *Integrating Equity, Addressing Barriers: Innovative Learning Practices by Unions* (2007) by the Labour Education Centre (Toronto) and the Centre for the Study of Education and Work (OISE/ University of Toronto).
3 Blauner (2001) updates the arugument with reflection on the dissolution of the various movements of the 60s, and the changes in demographic constitution of US society in the millennium.
4. Just over 70% of the labor force in Canada now works in some form of service delivery.
5. Upon separating from the American Federtion of Labour in 1935-38 (while also establishing itself in Canada at the same time), the Committee of Industrial Organizations changed its name to the Congress of Industrial Organizations.
6. The first few decades of the twentieth century have been the subject of several recent contributions on race, labor, and broader left political organizing as Palmer (2004) alerts us in his extended review of race and revolution where he asks (in reference to the American South of the 1920s): "Was the Black Belt a colony or not? What role did the landed masses play in this national struggle, and were their interests different from those of the industrial proletariat?" (p. 196). Citing the actions of the Wobblies as well as mainstream craft and industrial unionism and radical political parties, he goes on to outline instances when both "black and white saw common scarlet on the political horizon of the United States" amidst the contradictory internal racism of the various movements and the formal adoption of "race-conscious" policies.
7. At the turn of the 21st century it would seem that little has changed. Similar to the underrepresentation of workers-of-colour in the auto and stell sectors (7% and 4.2% respectively), the federal government has remained a bastion of white labour (only 5.6% of the labour force are workers-of-colour) (Galabuzi 2006, p. 113)
8. Workers of color make up just over 7% of the unionized workforce in comparison to the fact that citizens of color in Canada make 11.4% of the population.
9. www.hotelworkersrising.org/media
10. www.hotelworkersrising.org/media
11. This is a point which Owens-Moore (2005) links with Du Bois's notion of a double existence and "double consciousness" which suggests further dimensions of hotel workers' experiences. On the concept of "invisibility" see further reading in Goldberg (1997).

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