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Canadian Suburbia: From the Periphery of Empire to the Frontier of the Sub/Urban Century

Abstract

Canadian suburbia is part of settlement of indigenous landscapes. It was originally a product of the rapid growth of cities in the periphery of the British Empire. Working class immigrants often self-built their housing on the poorly serviced but surveyed lots of the industrializing cities; industry sometimes followed on the seemingly endless greenfields beyond. Later generations of European immigrants moved from crammed inner city quarters to post World War 2 subdivisions in the periphery, now opened up by inter-regional highways, transit, sewer and water services and soft infrastructures such as schools and universities. Many relocated to residential areas around emerging assembly plants of the Fordist period. Supported by federal housing programs, suburban single family homes became the standard of an Anglo-Saxon settler society in which landed property reigned supreme as an economic reality and ideological icon of arrival. In some places, such as Toronto, an alternative modern suburban landscape was erected in the form of tower neighbourhoods that stood out futuristically from townhomes and bungalows below. Ostensibly built for the domestic middle class, they turned out to become the port of entry for many new immigrants that came from around the world.

In extension of this trend in what is now the "inner suburbs", in recent decades, the suburbs and exurbs of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver have become the chief destinations of new generations of immigrants, mostly from non-European countries. This has changed the social composition, meaning and politics of suburbia fundamentally. The Canadian sub/urban periphery is now a prime site of the formation of globalized suburban constellations that define this century.

Résumé

La banlieue canadienne a originalement été un produit de la croissance rapide des villes situées aux périphéries de l'Empire britannique. Les immigrants de la classe ouvrière construisaient souvent leurs propres logements sur des parcelles mal-entretenues, mais quand même levées, des villes industrielles ; les générations ultérieurs d'immigrants européens ont déménagé des quartiers populaires situées au centre-ville, à des subdivisions périphériques, de la période d'après la deuxième guerre mondiale, maintenant ouvertes par les autoroutes inter-régionaux, les services d'eau et d'égout et les infrastructures 'douces' comme les écoles. Plusieurs ont déménagé à des régions entourées par des

usines de montage, qui ont émergés pendant la période Fordiste. Soutenus par des programmes fédéraux de logement, les pavillons suburbains sont devenus la norme de la société Anglo-Saxon, une société dans laquelle les propriétés terriennes régnaient comme réalité économique et comme icône idéologique d'arrivée.

Par contraste, pendant les décennies récentes, les banlieues et les exurbs de Montréal, Toronto et Vancouver sont devenues les destinations principales des nouveaux générations d'immigrants, pour la plupart venant de pays non-européens. Ce phénomène a changé la composition sociale, le sens et la politique de la banlieue, fondamentalement. La périphérie sub/urbaine canadienne est maintenant le site principal de la formation de constellations globalisés suburbains qui définissent ce siècle.

Introduction: the periphery of empire

Canada is a settler society: this means that suburbanization is also a taking of indigenous land. Let me begin this essay on suburbanization not in the core of Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver from where the suburban is usually imagined as a somewhat strange place, a kind of Mordor, a deep dark forest where the wild things are. Let me instead approach the suburban from the unsettled resource fringe of the Empire, a throwback to Harold Innis's (Keil et al. 1998) world of staples and continental scales, to the indigenous lands and frozen northern expanses from which neither cities nor suburbs are usually viewed. In modern settler societies like in the Americas, although land famously is imagined as *tabula rasa* (Veracini 2012: 342), it has had pre-colonial histories of indigenous use. The history of settlement entailed that these lands were opened up to survey, subdivision, development, and new modes of life. This was accomplished to a large degree by imagining these lands as 'new', 'empty' or 'a void' waiting to be urbanized and the uses of the land as archaic and obsolete (C. Harris 2004; Jacobs 1996). Lorenzo Veracini has interpreted "both suburbia and settler colonial phenomena as premised on an anxious escape that comprehensively rejects environments that are perceived as increasingly threatening" and noted "that suburbia *re-enacts* settlement" (2012: 340; emphasis in the original). Where Veracini focuses on the intersection of the formation of settler colonies with a particular type of suburbanism – a secessionist, middle class residential landscape characterized by "the single-family house, the nuclear family, the separation between work and home, and the separation between gendered spaces" (2012: 340) –, the Canadian case bears out other aspects of suburbanization: sprawling resource economies, mixed morphologies and socio-demographic and -economic diversity as we shall see below.

A country built historically on resources and staples and currently still banking on their continued economic value, urbanization and suburbanization are directly inscribed into the colonization of the Canadian land mass, its waters and of its peo-

Building on the feral edge, Kelowna (photo credit: author)

ples. At the beginning of considering the trajectory of the suburban in Canada, then, must exist an acknowledgement of the context of colonization. Following Cole Harris, that involves the taking and segregation of land at its core: "The experienced materiality of colonialism is grounded, as many have noted, in dispossessions and repossessions of land" (C. Harris 2004: 167). For that insight, Harris draws on Frantz Fanon and Edward Said. He quotes the latter in these terms:

> Underlying social space are territories, land, geographical domains, the actual geographical underpinnings of the imperial, and also the cultural contest. To think about distant places, to colonize them, to populate or depopulate them: all of this occurs on, about, or because of land. The actual geographical possession of land is what empire in the final analysis is all about (Said 1994, 78; quoted in C. Harris 2004: 167).

The stark reality that follows from this development in British Columbia manifested itself in "a reserve (reservation) system that allocated a small portion of the land to native people and opened the rest for development. Native people were in the way, their land was coveted, and settlers took it. The line between the reserves and the rest—between the land set aside for the people who had lived there from time immemorial and land made available in various tenures to immigrants— became the primary line on the map of British Columbia" (C. Harris 2004: 167).

The suburban landscape to which now most Canadians lay claim from coast to coast is mostly a function of the development part of this relationship of uneven spatialization. In this sense, as Stefan Kipfer has shown recently, in an essay on the pipeline politics that now span the Canadian expanse, "[t]he segregationist thrust of settler colonialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries relegated indigenous peoples to 'non-urban' settlements and symbolically excluded them from 'urban' civilization, indeed, 'history'" (Kipfer 2016: 22). While indigenous land becomes part of the operational landscape of the – resource-based – settler capitalism of the Canadian state, indigenous people become marginalized out of consciousness or even material existence. At the same time, the taking and subdivision of land has led to a tremendous gap in long-term wealth in all settler societies, including Canada. In Canada and in the United States political conflict has erupted over the compensation and reconciliation of land ownership denied to indigenous communities as well as African Americans/Canadians, as generational wealth has largely bypassed these communities while white privilege can be easily read off the map of suburban home- and asset-ownership (Holmes 2017).

Capitalocenic footprints

Each year, I take a group of up to 100 undergraduate students 150 kilometres north of Toronto to two historic sites in the small industrial town of Midland, Ontario. One is the Huronia Museum, a community based institution that, since the 1940s, presents a version of indigenous history to mostly schoolchildren and German visitors. It has a palisaded indigenous village by a lake that contains longhouses, wigwams, a sweat lodge and other real or imagined parts of native life before contact. This well-meaning relic from a different period of colonialism is overshadowed by the other site, across town where the first Europeans in Ontario settled in the 1630s: Sainte Marie Among the Hurons, a lavishly equipped "living museum" where guides in period costumes take visitors through a history of ten years of missionary life in the 1630s. This representation of distantly past forms of "settlement" sits adjacent to suburban development – industrial and residential – in the town of Midland and along the Georgian Bay shore to the East. Those suburban extensions in a midsize near northern Ontario town are now naturalized vis-à-vis the prior forms of settlement in the area that used to cover the landscape for hundreds of years before. The longhouses are now the historically marked Other in an environment of generalized modern suburbia.

The building of cities and suburbs in the bush, or in previously indigenous agricultured landscapes as in the case of the Wendat territory, has a long and lasting history in Canada. Rob Shields reminds us, of course, that the colonization of the land in Canada, especially where it is tied to resource exploitation in the North, is *primary* suburbanization before urbanization. In the resource periphery, suburban subdivisions emerge where no city yet exists. He calls the product of such voracious land taking in the bush "feral suburbs" and observes for the Tar Sands capital Fort

McMurray, Alberta that "strangeness vies with normality as cultural and economic forms of shift-work and suburban life are remade" at that particular frontier of suburbanism (Shields 2012: 206). Importantly, Fort McMurray signals a mode of suburbanization that is more universal now in Canada and elsewhere, in that it gives up the city as its referent. Shields observes:

> Many thus rent basement suites in the new suburbs laid out on freshly cleared land, bulldozed into the pine and spruce forests and muskeg bogs of the flat, boreal plain above the downtown river valley, which is situated at the confluence of the Athabasca and Clearwater Rivers. Set up above the river valley, suburbia in Fort McMurray is independent of the pre-existing downtown (Shields 2012: 207).

In this sense, the "feral" suburbanism of "Fort Mc" is also the frontier of suburbanization more generally. At that particular edge, suburbanism rehearses life in predictable sameness as vinyl meets the wild. Yet such suburban frontier ways of life now signal the historical end of suburbanization as a specific mode of automobile-based suburbanization that emanates out from historical centres. It attains autonomy from the assumed teleology of the urban.

Yet, the suburbanization of the edge of Empire (now the empire of carbon), also begs questions about survival in the age of climate change. Ultimately, if it doesn't work here where the oil is squeezed from the mossy ground, it can't work anywhere. We are reminded here of Andrew Ross's (2011) keen observations, in his book *Bird on Fire,* about Phoenix, Arizona, one of the most suburban cities in the world and perhaps "the world's least sustainable city". As cities like these exist across the continent, they continue to present a challenge for us to think through the future that is in stock for all of us at the end of the pipeline.

Geographically, the notion of absolute ecological limits was brought home to the residents of feral suburbia in Fort McMurray during the devastating wild fires of 2016 that turned 1,958 structures into ash and rubble, translating into the loss of 2,574 housing units (Bird 2016). It sent thousands of families packing up their belongings trekking down highway 63 to Edmonton driving literally through a ring of fire. The resettlement was still ongoing almost a year after the event.

The Fort McMurray tragedy calls into question the notion of suburbanization as an escape from the dangers of the city and the perils of living *against* rather than *with* the metabolism of the natural environment. As the late great historian of California, Kevin Starr (2017 [1993]), said about the deadly suburban ecologies of his home state: There is danger everywhere:

> We flee to the suburbs for safety — and a firestorm engulfs us. We flee to the suburbs because we believe the human factor in the city has reached a critical mass of deficiency. In the city, there are too many crim-

> inals, too many sociopaths, too many homeless and marginalized. And then a transient — another way of saying marginalized — lights a fire in the suburb of Altadena, and 115 homes fall victim to the firestorm in the San Gabriel foothills. We know Los Angeles is combustible. We saw it burn in April-May, 1992. In that instance, the social factor — a volatile populace in certain sections of the city, an unpopular verdict, a contagion of criminal behavior spreading like wild fire — ignited the flames. And yet, in the case of the firestorms that engulfed neighborhoods in Altadena and Sierra Madre, in Laguna Beach, in Villa Park and the Anaheim Hills, in Thousand Oaks and Malibu, the human factor — a careless transient and as many as three, perhaps more, deliberate acts of arson — initiated the catastrophe.

But there is also another way of thinking about the Canadian north as a form of intricate and internal operationalization of a landscape of urban society in Canada more generally. In Ft. McMurray the Canadian suburban crystallizes as both a space where problems originate and where they manifest themselves. In this, they are the prime spaces of the Anthropocene, or, as Jason Moore has called it more plausibly, "the capitalocene" (2015): Suburbanization is where the destructive trajectory of the capitalocene finds an address and a culpable actor network of political economies that produce and use space. In the Canadian resource suburbs at the edge of Empire, both aspects of the suburban meet: their own ravenous appetite for the irreplaceable energies of the fossil fuel deposits, and the production of those fossil fuels in a pervasive resource economy itself.

Canadian suburbia thus is part of a larger extended urbanization. Brazilian scholar Roberto Monte-Mor (2014) has proposed the notion of "extended urbanization" as a framework to understand the Brazilian Amazon. We can use this concept to describe the vast reach of the Canadian suburban, too. In Canada, like in Brazil, a highly urbanized country with a giant, seemingly undeveloped, land mass, the extended suburban is a way of continental life. What seems peripheral at first, however, becomes the location of new forms of centrality (see Keil 2017; Kipfer 2016).

In a country where centrality is usually understood to be synonymous with a few urban agglomerations along the Canadian-US border, and especially with the large centres of Toronto, Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver within that geography, Fort McMurray, "the suburb at the end of the highway" as Claire Major (2013) has named it, signals a type of inbetweenness that has heretofore been mostly identified with the urban. Major, accordingly, describes Ft McMurray in terms reminiscent of the Los Angeles of Edward Soja in the 1980s:

> Thus it is possible to make the claim that Fort McMurray is at the crossroads of many things and many people. Passing through it is South Korean-made, industrial-scale equipment, transported to Imperial Oil's

> Kearl Lake site by way of Washington, Idaho, and Montana; the equipment was too large to be driven through the Rocky Mountains. It is where live-in caregivers, usually from the Philippines, enable Albertan or newly migrated families from eastern Canada to get relatively affordable childcare. It is home to professional, skilled immigrants, recruited directly from the Middle East, India, South America, South Africa, and Australia to meet the technical labor gap and to manage mines. It is a place of speculative capital, of Israeli companies and Chinese foreign interests. It is an incomplete tapestry of people who lack connection to place (Major 2013: 146).

Importantly, Ft. McMurray is a suburb *before* urbanization and in that it is just a symbol of something broader. Here is how Major describes the sprawl of Ft. Mc Murray: "'Sameness' is a movement westward and into a suburb that is neither low-brow nor banal, nor exclusive and separate; rather, suburban life is the default outcome because there is nothing else available" (2013: 146). But these words describe suburbanization in Canada more generally. The lack of an alternative and the availability of space and technology predispose the suburban in ways that would not equally be plausible in other geographical and social settings such as, say, the Netherlands or Switzerland.

The core of Empire

Canadian suburbia was originally a product of the rapid growth of cities in the periphery of the British Empire. Working class immigrants often self-built their housing on the poorly serviced but surveyed lots of the industrializing cities; industry sometimes followed on the seemingly endless greenfields beyond. Later generations of European immigrants moved from crammed inner city quarters to post World War 2 subdivisions in the periphery, now opened up by inter-regional highways, transit, sewer and water services and soft infrastructures such as schools and universities. Many moved to residential areas around emerging assembly plants of the Fordist period. Supported by federal housing programs, suburban single family homes became the standard of an Anglo-Saxon settler society in which landed property reigned supreme as an economic reality and ideological icon or arrival. In some places, such as Toronto, an alternative modern suburban landscape was erected in the form of tower neighbourhoods that stood futuristically out from townhomes and bungalows below (Logan forthcoming). Ostensibly built for the domestic middle class, they turned out to become the port of entry for many new immigrants that came from around the world. In extension of this trend in what is now the "inner suburbs", in recent decades, the suburbs and exurbs of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver have become the chief destinations of new generations of immigrants, mostly from non-European countries. This has changed the social composition, meaning and politics of suburbia fundamentally. The Canadian sub/urban periphery

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Suburban edge, Brampton (photo credit: author)

So, let's now leave the North and move south, from the periphery of Empire to its core. Toronto has been the heart of the Canadian economy for half a century, and it was an important location even at a time when Montreal was still the undisputed economic, financial and cultural centre of the country. As Richard White (2016), John Sewell (2009), and others have explained, the suburban in Toronto was a planned tragedy. Richard White (2017) noted just recently:

> In the early 1950s, once it became clear that Toronto's metropolitan area was going to continue growing, the Province of Ontario created a planning board to plan and manage the expected expansion, and the board did so in a remarkably comprehensive manner: land-uses, roads, transit, piped services, parks, schools, and even, to a degree, health and social services all formed part of a metropolitan plan. Moreover the plan was actually followed and the required infrastructure was built, at a size and scale sufficient for the projected population.

Richard Harris reminds us that this was not always the case. In fact, the earliest forms of suburbanization in Toronto as elsewhere in Canada were bottom up, informal (in the colloquial sense), individualist acts of building on the periphery. "In Toronto unplanned development and the growth of blue collar suburbs were close-

ly intertwined," declares Harris in his landmark book on the subject (1996: 4). During the period of initial industrial urbanization, up until the 1930s in Toronto, for example, much of it was working class and immigrant. Towards the middle of the century, this was reversed and the suburbs became less proletarian (Harris 1996:50).

While these were not quite the *gecekondu* of Istanbul in scale and pervasiveness, the overnight shacks that popped up in Toronto's east end or elsewhere early in the 20th century and later grew into brick buildings served by water and sewer, had sidewalks in front and later even transit service, and they were also peripheral in the double sense. They existed as an outcome of the class, ethnic and racial separations that sorted the populations who arrived in that frigid outpost of the Empire on Lake Ontario; and they drove the expansion of the city in lockstep with the peripheralization of industry. Because, long before the consumer temples of the shopping malls became the signature artefact of the suburban ring, it was the factories that signalled the edge..

So, what Harris (1996: 1) has called the settling in the "shacktown fringe" was a formative moment in Toronto's and Canada's history as well as the source of a mythology that has inscribed itself into the suburban narrative of the country since. The protestant grid of the settler landscape, to engage a notion by Richard Sennett (1992), did its ordering work in Toronto and elsewhere in the country. It was the ideal blueprint for a suburban nation. It lined up slim, private property after slim private property, up and along rectangular streets. In the beginning, as Harris continues, this entailed "families building their own homes" (Harris 1996: 2) – later to be replaced by large and small scale property development corporations who also exchanged the idiosyncratic, organic, vernacular of the suburban home for a standardized, machine-based aesthetic that could be reproduced at will. But the myth of the self-built home lived on in the general acceptance of the home as the place to live and the suburban homestead as the fulfilment of the Canadian dream. Much later, it became the basis of what the architect Raymond Carver called – and I am relying here on Steven Logan's superb forthcoming book on the modernist suburb in Toronto and Prague – "house lust" which Carver defined in these terms: "the enjoyment of a beautiful house [which] is par excellence a satisfying and intellectual accomplishment" (quoted in Logan, forthcoming: 145). To Carver, like to many European immigrants from the Scottish, English and Irish a century ago, to the Italians and Portuguese in the post World War 2 decades, and the East and South Asians of today, this house lust was the core of the immigrant experience. In the 1950s when Carver is active, the self-building was largely over but the "deep and primitive urge" to "possess and beautify a place you can love" persisted. Logan notes perceptively: "House lust brought Europeans to North America, becoming the 'most important element in the life-style of any community'" (Logan forthcoming: 145).

Scarborough, immigrant suburb (photo credit: author)

Naturally, once built, the immigrant communities are changing. From his perch in Hamilton, Ontario, Richard Harris observes that "the transitional aspect of suburban land is obvious" (2013: 33) and continues that this simple truth still is not easy to grasp. He invites us to "see the city block as a one-time urban fringe" (ibid.). Yet, the reality of suburban change, and the existence of the land market that structures it is often hard to accept, especially for the suburbanites themselves. In Canada, like in much of the Anglo Saxon world, the landscapes and morphologies of which have served as the model for most writing on suburbia, this dialectics of constant change and the hesitation to admit it, is tied to the three connected aspects of low density urban form, private home ownership and an automobile infrastructure. The first two aspects were more or less historical accidents as the low-density development now typical of most cities in Australia, America and Canada was not the only form suburban areas could have adopted although some have argued that the horizontality of the suburban settler colonial landscape was a distinctive mark of these societies (Veracini 2012: 342-3).

As Pierre Filion and Claire Poitras among others remind us, the determining factor of infrastructure was important: infrastructure was the message. Expressway networks in particular allowed development to fan out – also supported by extensive other networked infrastructures such as big sewer pipes and electricity grids – over extensive swaths of subdivided land (Filion 2013; Poitras 2011). The late modern and

imperial periods of extensive colonial urbanization around the globe had given the new suburban settlers a range of choices between the classic bungalow and the mansion. The bungalow represented the simplicity of private residential space that had been spread under British colonial rule from India to the UK, California, Canada and other parts of the world (King 2004). The mansion was a product of the preferences of early modern English gentry who brought a romantic and sometimes lavish sense of luxurious style to the periurban zone from the city, often linked to tourism near and far. In this settlement of the English, Canadian American and Australian (soon to be suburbanized) countryside, based on the principle of enclosure to a considerable extent, a new national narrative was woven, as Alvaro Sevilla-Buitrago tells us, with the threads of a "new symbolic economy that had a direct influence on the image and imagination of national territories" (Sevilla-Buitrago 2014: 251). To this imaginary, to which much of Canada subscribed, the single family home was central. That it also fit nicely with the growing demands of a mass-produced form of housing and the desires of the development industry to maximize their profits on a grid of tract housing cemented the role of the bungalow-mansion spectrum of houses at the core of the suburban model in much of the English commonwealth.

Yet, it is necessary to remember that "the dominance of the freestanding single-family house in major urban settings is a relatively recent phenomenon" and a product of "a great deal of experimentation" (Ford 1994: 127). Especially during the Victorian era, the drive for middle class domesticity and distinctive national culture coalesced in such a way that "[w]hile city dwellers elsewhere in the world were content to live in a wide variety of settings, to be an American was to live in a house" (Ford, 1994: 134). This urban ideal ultimately also infused the massive suburbanization that characterized America in the 20th century. And, as Keller Easterling has perceptively noted, "[a] design idea for suburbia becomes more powerful when it is positioned as a multiplier that affects a population of houses" (2014: 84). The house became the relay station of the Fordist-Keynesian regime of accumulation, a position that lingered into the current age of Metroburbia when consumption of space and gadgetry knows no bounds (Knox 2008).

In Canada, as elsewhere in the British Empire, the suburb of homes was also a suburb of home*owners*. Alongside the form, there was the private title to the land and to the property that characterized this thrust of suburbanization in Anglo-America. Houses were owned, as was the land, whether those structures were built through a formal, regulated process of subdivision and mass production or a more informal ("unplanned") process of acquisition and sweat equity (R. Harris 1996). Established discursively versus "the lodger evil" and the "unstable tenant," home ownership was considered a societal goal with in-built benefits of great value. Privacy was seen as the glue of society and contributed to the protection of the family. The disciplining effects of home ownership on workers and immigrants were emphatically emphasized.

Taken together, these developments resulted in what Richard Harris (2014) has called "three suburban stereotypes about North American suburbs": the ideal quest for privacy, conformity with the suburban ideal, and the common misgivings among researchers about suburbia. In any case, homeownership was a central feature of the new Canadian sub/urban society that was taking shape. Richard Harris writes:

> In Toronto and across the continent, just about everyone felt that homeownership was a good thing. They believed that it reinforced the independence of the family, encouraging thrift and reducing demands upon the public purse. It was the general opinion that homeownership had an especially beneficial effect on workers and immigrants, two groups whose commitment to the status quo could not be taken for granted. Homeownership was supposed to encourage stable work habits while providing workers with a stake in the capitalist system. It gave immigrants roots, helping to 'naturalize' them to North American ways and making them good citizens (1996: 97).

The spreading, not yet sprawling, of the suburban form appeared as some sort of fulfilment of the "romance of the common life" (R. Harris 1996: 20). For those who were not pushed, the pull seemed more than plausible as Richard White has observed: "Suburbia in the 1950s was so much more attractive than run-down old city neighbourhoods, with their rows of nearly windowless old houses crammed into narrow lots on streets arranged in unimaginative rectilinear grids" (White 2017). The distinction, the move away, was still logical, part of an almost natural wave that was hard to resist. The holdouts were either too rich or too poor to move, the middle classes headed for the fringe, which, in sum, also helps explain the fact that in 1970, at the height of the suburban expansion, income differentials appeared rather flat.

Having spent so much time now to dwell on the single family home, it must be added that much housing in suburban Canada, in contrast to its southern neighbour, comes in the form of high rises. The concrete slab tower is a dominant feature of the inner, and even outer suburbs of Toronto, for example. More than 1000 such towers exist, mostly built in the 1960s through the 1980s. Their fate is peculiar as they have become both visible and invisible landmarks of suburban life. Visible when they are projection spaces for the discourse of suburban decay; invisible as they continue to be hidden from plain view when it comes to the debate on the future of urbanity in Toronto. The towers, to which we will soon return in the closing sections of this paper, are also a stark reminder that in Canada, as elsewhere, the suburbs are a complex and complicated product of three modalities that make and govern them. Far from being just a consequence of consumer desire, as the development industry wants to make us believe, suburbanization is a strategic production of space. Suburban governance in Canada regulates suburbanization as a sys-

temic product of state action, capital accumulation and increasingly private authoritarianism (Ekers/Hamel/Keil 2012). In some form and combination, these three modalities of governance build the suburbs and regulate suburban life. In Canada, more than in the United States and less than in Europe, the state has imposed itself in defining the morphology, pace and reach of suburbanization. This has, moreover, made the suburbs a strategic space for immigrant settlement.

High rises, inner suburbia, Toronto (photo credit: author)

The suburbs define Canada. They are the country's most defining form of settlement. They are the core of Empire. Some see this now come to an end. Jennifer Keesmaat, the charismatic former chief planner of Canada's largest city, predicts the end of suburbanization in Toronto and elsewhere by pronouncing that "in the 20th century, growth was all about moving outwards. In the 21st century, it is all about coming back in again" (in: Greene 2016, Video 1). That may be true for some but for now, the spread and sprawl continue. Let's look at what those urban peripheries might have in store for us in the near future.

After Empire

To find the Canadian suburb today, we have to look beyond Empire towards the postcolony. This entails mainly two strident advances.[1] One is to free ourselves from the theoretical baggage of the urban gaze towards the suburbs and free suburbanism from the fetters of the urban-centred yardstick. And the second advance is to look beyond the arrival cities of the liberal mind to the reality of the postcolonial in

1 This first section borrows from joint work with Sean Hertel.

the Canadian periphery. Let us first deal with the existing urban view on the suburbs. There is a curious, and somewhat quaint, passage in Jane Jacobs's last book, *Dark Age Ahead* (2004). The great American urbanist, whose life and death was so intimately linked to her adopted hometown of Toronto, Canada, where she resided for 37 years, tells in her typical anecdotal style of an excursion from her inner city habitat in the Annex neighbourhood to the region's suburban ring:

> Vaughan is a suburb directly across the street from Toronto, at the northernmost border of the city. It is a subdivision of a larger suburb named Woodbridge, which in turn is a political subdivision of a suburban and exurban sprawl called York. Vaughan has many gated, expensive housing tracts, along with the usual suburban complement of shopping malls. Except for a tiny heart of shops around a public square along with a large apartment house, at the center of Woodbridge, where one actually sees human beings walking, there is nothing physically resembling a city. But the heart, including the apartment building and scattering of old houses left over from the time when this was a country town, is humanly scaled, pleasant, and physically welcoming. Two of my neighbors and I decided to drive up to Vaughan on a beautiful autumn Saturday and see what changes had been going on up there. (2004: 89)

Without denigrating the memory and legacy of the great Jane Jacobs, it is obvious here that her grasp on the Toronto suburbs was fleeting, superficial and rather judgmental. Yet, what is remarkable about this short passage in the context of our current concern is the *attitude* on display as she "drives up to Vaughan" with her neighbours. In her drive-by analysis of the world "across the street from Toronto", Jacobs takes much downtown baggage with her which she then unpacks and places at the feet of the suburbanites. It is this hyperbolic "suburban safari", a certain colonial, touristic perspective that is equally troubling about and typical of much urbanist discourse today in Canada and elsewhere. Jacobs deprecates the obvious shortcomings of those landscapes from an unapologetic city-ist vantage point. What is wrong about the suburbs she visits is clearly of their own making and signs of the general decline that is subject to her musings in the pessimistic *Dark Age Ahead*.

Jacobs ends with a ray of hope: "Is suburban sprawl, with its murders of communities and wastes of land, time and energy, a sign of decay? Or is rising interest in means of overcoming sprawl a sign of vigor and adaptability in North American culture? Arguably, either could turn out to be true" (2004: 169-70). Hope on the side of the great urban barefoot doctor who leaves the inner city with her medical kit to mend the wounds of the sick suburb supersedes for now the depression of those landscapes. Yet, still, the intended fixing appears to remain a task to be undertaken by the enlightened urbanists from the centre rather than by the suburbanites them-

selves. We now see legions of well-meaning urbanites and urbanists descend on the Canadian suburbs to fix their woes with "more city," with an "urban solution". That solution entails, in most cases, a set of predictable ingredients (pedestrianization, transit hub development, densification, etc.) that, if properly mixed, would save the suburbs from themselves.

I propose a different approach. I posit here that the Canadian suburbs of the 21st century are more than incomplete or immature cities. They cannot be entirely understood from the intellectual construct and geographical place called city and from the mentality of a gentrified, inner city urbanity against which they are often measured. Much more, they must not be subjected to the colonial gaze and ultimately grasp of the inner urban reformer without taking the lived experience, city-building expertise and political presence of suburban communities into account (Keil 2017).

Arriving in Canada, Living in Suburbia

Let's end our trip to post-Empire Canadian suburbia with a contemplation of what we mostly find when we get there. In the inner suburbs, the outer reaches of the City of Toronto, we find a landscape of high-rise towers in the midst of a sea of low-rise bungalows and split levels. Shawn Micallef who has walked through the expanses of this landscape for his superb new book *Frontier City* (2017) talks about a "topography of Toronto *noir*, a mid-century modern drama well lit by sodium vapour lamps, at once more suburban and affluent than the usual dingy settings of *noir* tales" (42). It is a landscape without "continuous flow" (50), interrupted by infrastructures and zoning changes, it is the domain of Ford Nation, the nameless supporters of Toronto' s late, flawed suburban mayor Rob Ford which – like a postpolitical undead itself – has recently latched itself onto a renewed mayoral campaign of Rob's older brother Doug. Those areas, often perceived as "a suburban wasteland" (51), are, however, home to Toronto's large and growing immigrant population. Beyond the broken veneer of the ordinary lies a new urban society, largely detached from the classical centre that used to define the periphery. Its urbanity is unmoored from anything that classically defines middle class urbanity. More likely, it resembles the urbanity that Canadian political theorist Julie-Anne Boudreau sees as typical for today's world: "a geographically uneven set of historical conditions, which affects ways of life, modes of interaction, economic transactions, political relations and worldviews" (Boudreau 2016: 12). The inner suburbs are of a marginal urbanity where unevenness is a striking reality in socio-economic and socio-spatial terms.

Toronto journalist Doug Saunders (2011) tends to normalize immigrant suburbanization in his work on the *Arrival City* into a universal and predictable experience of liberal market based success (secured by social democratic rule regimes). This certainly captures part of that experience. And in combination with the national ideology of multiculturalism, this programmatic interpretation has had much currency. But what is happening in Canadian immigrant suburbs now is a different story. In

order to get to know this story, we need to venture beyond the city limits, into outer suburbia.

In the suburban ring around Toronto where now more than half of the region's people live, the majority of the population will soon be non-white and new immigrant throughout. Those suburban cities, from Mississauga and Brampton in the west to Markham in the east, have become home to large minorities or even majorities of East and South Asians -- Chinese, Tamils, Pakistani, Indians – as well as hundreds of thousands of migrants from elsewhere in those parts of the world that mostly feed Canadian immigration.

These "cities in waiting" are not quite set in their ways and shapes but they are slowly congealing into a post-colonial peripheral urban landscape. They represent new assemblages of the global. They are contiguous extensions of the immediate urban form but they represent satellites of global connectivities, outcrops of diasporic population flows. Immigration turns into settlement in the suburban fringe. The suburban constellation that emerges in the Toronto suburbs may look like a contiguous extension of the suburban form but they represent a break with the narrative of urbanization and modernization that had heretofore carried Canadian urban history. This break may signify two things: suburbs are not anymore the kind of passive places that wait to be integrated into a preordained trajectory of urbanization; and the Anglo-Saxon modernity for which suburbanization was the most visible expression is now challenged by new, multiple narratives of modernization that take a different direction altogether. The emergent immigrant suburbia offers new complexities. Toronto used to be called Vienna surrounded by Phoenix, Arizona. Now, Toronto is better described as Los Angeles surrounded by Shanghai.

Perhaps most importantly, these developments trouble the conventional use of the concepts of multiculturalism and diversity that seem innate to Canadian urbanism. As Jay Pitter tells us in her introduction to a critical new book on the subject, we have entered a period of "hyper-diversity". Politically, this entails an "intersectionality [that] requires us to acknowledge that our cities contain diversities within diversities within diversities. They are deeply complicated places" (Pitter 2016: 9).

One of those newly complicated suburban places "where the visible minorities are now the majority" (Ahmed-Ullah 2016: 242) is the City of Brampton, home to almost 600,000, in the north west of the urban area. More than 350,000 of these were citizens from visible minority populations in 2011. Noreen Ahmed-Ullah lists nicknames for the place as "Browntown", "Bramladesh", or "Singhdale". These are reflections of a majority south Asian residential population, and perhaps also workforce, in the burgeoning suburb whose population is projected to grow to 840,000 in 2031. Brampton has now entered debates about its future that entail, among other aspects, the question whether the presence of forty percent South Asians in one place will eventually lead to ghettoization or enclaving in the future. Be that as it may, and only speculative answers can be given at this point, a new era has begun. Ahmed-Ullah resumes: "Regardless of whether Brampton is or isn't a ghetto, that

label alone is an ominous marker. It raises tough questions about the future of a city that's been profoundly reshaped by the immigrants who've made their homes here" (Ahmed-Ullah 2016: 244). To Ahmed-Ullah there could be all kinds of answers to these tough questions, whether this leads to more insularity or more political power, for example. One thing is clear, though, if we want to understand Canadian suburbia, or for that matter the Canadian city today, we better start in the urban periphery where we find Brampton, Mississauga, Vaughan or Markham.

The suburban has now become the norm of the urban and the norm of settlement across Canada, policies and plans that promote re-urbanization not withstanding. Suburbanization is inscribed in the edge of Empire in history and current resource geographies. The core of Empire is unthinkable without suburbanization. It structures the ways cities have grown in at least a century. The post-suburban presence in the Toronto suburbs is also a postcolonial future where new relationships of city and society are generally negotiated beyond the traditional understandings of Anglo-Saxon suburbia.

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