

Decolonizing Suburban Research¹

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North American Suburbs have been treated as sites of a collective amnesia concerning previous patterns of occupation and occupants. As ‘Greenfield sites’ they often either lack history or local history is shallow, rarely extending back before the agricultural tenants of the last century. A number of critics have pointed out that Indigeneity, migrancy and ethnicity have received less attention in urban and suburban research than they should have (Dasgupta and Gururani 2018:42; Keil 2013; Roy 2011). This chapter considers the challenges of researching past occupation that has often been erased along with removal of the flora and fauna and, commonly, even the topsoil (see also *Overburden*, 2009). Recent literature on the ‘decolonization’ of urban and suburban research that draws on Postcolonial critique and theories of Settler Colonial Society to open a new vantage point on suburbia. North American suburbs are not greenfield sites after all. They are intersectional sites of a ‘colonial matrix’ or logic that combines capitalism, colonialism, nationalism and modernity. This background provides the basis for new methods that are being developed to study suburbs. The tensions of these forces emerge in the more conspicuous dysfunctionality of suburbia—its consumerism, commuting times, energy expense and even household divisions of labour inside those tract houses.



Figure 1 Rooster Town, Winnipeg Manitoba. Winnipeg Free Press 1959.

The viewpoint of Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States have often been excluded from official histories of place and place-making. Often removed from areas near settlements during colonial times, Indigenous populations were segregated into reserves or ghettoized in the inner city. Those who

¹ Forthcoming Ch. 18 in R. Keil and F. Wu, *After Suburbia*, University of Toronto Press 2021.

had called suburban areas home were excluded or disregarded. Although Indigenous histories and historical place names were often the source of picturesque street and park names, the history itself was either not celebrated or treated as an archive of a past culture of extinct traditions. North American periurban areas still bear the 'interspatiality' (McIlvenny et al., 2009) or marks and appropriations from an erased Indigenous spatialization (Shields, 1991). Even as settlers or their descendants such as myself, many researchers have been more and more struck by a general Indigenous absence that only seems to become more tangible the more pre-existing occupation or history is repressed.

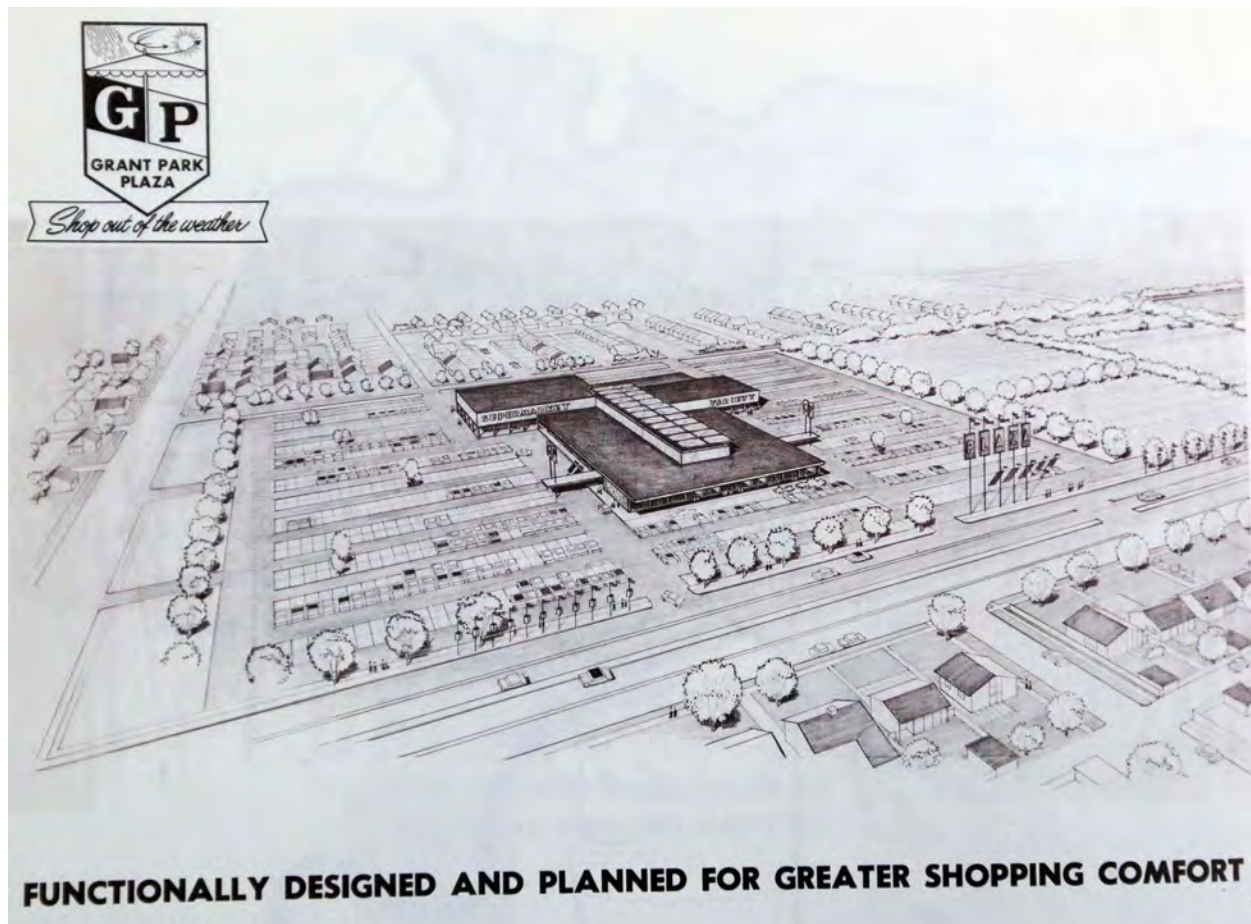


Figure 2 Grant Park Plaza, Grant Ave. Winnipeg. Waisman Ross Architects. City of Winnipeg Archives 1960.

Background: Postcolonial and decolonializing approaches

I begin with a review of approaches that are influencing decolonial research on North American suburbs. Decolonial urban and suburban research builds not only on previous scholarship on the built environment, social spatializations and urbanization but also on Postcolonial Critiques of nationalism and racism that emerged in the humanities, Critical Race Studies and Native Studies in the second half of the twentieth century. After the end of European Empires, with Independence in former colonies, the vantage point of Postcolonial writers and critics reversed from metropolitan centres of European empires to a view from the peripheries (Gilmartin and Berg 2007).¹

Decolonial and decolonizing research agendas have focused firstly on cultural and educational systems in which there was an imbalance of knowledge and perspectives between Eurocentric hierarchies of prestige and authority versus colonial, peripheral or subaltern perspectives and priorities. The challenge is epistemic. Decolonial approaches not only dispute historical facts but critique dominant disciplines and cultural institutions that have hidden the ethics of research and the representation of knowledge by ignoring moral dimensions of right and wrong, claiming objectivity. Despite their limited vantage point, Eurocentric researchers and institutions claimed a universality and value neutrality for their arguments. Decolonial theory drew on historical geography and used geographical relations, travel and diaspora in ways that allowed researchers to begin to reappraise the role of academic disciplines in imperialism and in forming spatial prejudices (Said 1978; Gilroy 1993). Decolonial writers advocate the development of new analytical perspectives that expose and replace the 'colonial matrix' of not only nationalism, capitalism and colonialism but modernity itself (Mignolo, 2011: xxvii). Decolonial theory argues that this logic has persisted after political decolonization through economic and cultural globalization. It has perpetuated a hierarchy of racial, gender and epistemic values that privilege dominant white, Euro-American 'Western' elites (Lugones, 2003; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2007).

Decolonial theory identifies alternatives as well as existing trajectories that have continued to exist within and at the margins of dominant forms of modernity, or that delink from the colonial matrix. Alternatives to the four aspects of nationalism, modernity, capitalism and colonialism are argued to lie with those marginalized by this matrix, including the subaltern, Indigenous, and migrant populations. However, many projects under the banner of 'emancipation' are questioned as pathways that only lead back to the same totalizing logic as modernity. Instead, they argue that we should avoid the abstraction and universality of the existing media and academic claims. Knowledge should be more nuanced, recognize local specificity and foster a plurality of voices rather than a simple hierarchy led by Euro-American experts only. In this way, it will be a better basis for understanding the two faces of modernity which includes both development and, at the same time, recognizes exploitation and thus for action to resolve injustices.

In the last two decades, Indigenous research (Smith, 2012) has taken up the decolonization agenda. It is counterposed to research and cultural production that blindly serves the needs of Capital or the State for statistical surveillance and for social management and ideological control of culture. The dominant model and its experts have tended to 'label' and criminalize economically- and culturally-marginalized Others. Colonial knowledge projects presuming universal superiority of dominant Euro-American culture have attempted to extract and exploit marginalized knowledges (from agricultural techniques to medicinal remedies to cultural motifs). Indigenous cultures have been articulate in rejecting research that is 'done' to them rather than with or for them (Maori elder cited in Smith, 2012: xi). Rather than continuing Victorian missions to conquer, normalize and assimilate populations into roles established for them by a dominant elite, 'decolonization' became a mantle for research approaches that try not only to expand knowledge but also to enlighten, liberate and to work in the interests of their most vulnerable research participants. This amounts to a critique that is more than methodological. Decolonial critiques challenge and shame existing value systems and expose the vulnerability of 'Western' moral systems to this critique (Snyman, 2015).

In the case of urban and suburban research, a Decolonial approach adds cultural recognition as essential in addition to redistributive justice that political economists have focused on. It supports demands for recognition by Indigenous and diasporic communities such as migrant labourers and temporary foreign workers and immigrants. Decolonization research has sensitized policy makers and innovators to ongoing relations of exploitation (Snyman, 2015) and has become more inclusive in the values, legal entitlements and social arrangements that are created at city-region scales. It validates municipalities as lead actors in responses to social problems such as homelessness. Decolonization points to the importance of overlooked or erased aspects of places and demands that researchers reflect on and

state the position from which they come as researchers.

Settler Colonial Society

In North America, the role of settler colonization in clearing and assembling land is evident. Histories of places written by European settlers focused on what O'Brien calls '*Firsting and Lasting*,' naming the first settlers and categorizing Indigenous occupants as the last of their cultures, thus naturalizing the takeover of areas by the new arrivals (O'Brien, 2010). Drawing on empirical research in Australia and North America, Settler Colonial Studies critiques Eurocentric political economy and history (Wolfe, 1999). It demonstrates the role of occupying land as preconditions to accumulation by dispossession and as spatial fixes for capitalism (Harvey, 2005). Colonialism is at the centre of Western economic history and essential to understand the success of capitalism. Settler colonialism eliminates residents or Indigenous populations who are replaced by settlers and/or slaves and other migrants (Wolfe, 1999; 2006; 2011). "Settler colonialism implicates everyone." It denies "the existence of Indigenous peoples and the legitimacy of claims to land," "the long-lasting impacts of slavery," and "requires arrivants to participate as settlers" (Tuck & Yang, 2012; cited in Tuck and McKenzie, 2015: 69-70).

A growing literature over the last two decades on urban studies and Indigeneity has developed well beyond work on the social and health problems of Indigenous city dwellers (Peters, 2004; Auger, 1999; Browne et al., 2009). Settler Colonial Studies' truly new contributions to History, Sociology, Geography and Planning are still not in the mainstream (Patrick, 2015: 534). However, a growing chorus of scholarship considers cities and suburbs as Indigenous land. This empirical research changes the perspective on cities such as Chicago (Bang et al., 2010; LaGrand, 2002), Detroit (Mays, 2015), Sydney (Gulson and Parkes, 2009) or San Diego (Pulido, 2000).

Thrush's analyses of Seattle and London shows that even imperial centres were taken up and partly shared by Indigenous geographies and cultural networks (2016; 2017). His Indigenous history of the Seattle area argues that Indigenous title to the land has been reduced and encroached upon to remake Seattle and Tacoma into cities where Indigenous heritage and people are repressed (2017). However, appropriating this invisibility and repression, Indigenous writers and cultures more broadly have sought to replace a sense of absence, urban haunting and "settler guilt with Indigenous mourning, and imagined spectral ancestries with actual genealogies embedded in the land" (Boyd and Thrush, 2011: xx; Thrush, 2013; 2016). They try to activate the remaining interspatiality of previous patterns of occupation and land use.

Place is a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating with the world... ways of knowing often guide forms of resistance to power relations that threaten to erase or destroy our senses of place. This... is precisely the understanding of land and/or place that not only anchors many Indigenous peoples' critique of colonial relations of force and command, but also our visions of what a truly post-colonial relationship of peaceful coexistence might look like (Coulthard, 2014: 79-80).

The insight that knowledges are embedded in place or 'co-produced' in place-based practices (Basso 1996; Tallbear, 2013) is taken up by Tuck and McKenzie (2015) as a Decolonial and Indigenous method. Indigenous methods are characterized by a dynamic orientation in which ecological forces are treated as agential and causal (e.g. Bang et al., 2014). Louis provides an excellent overview of common points across Indigenous methodological and ethical thinking (Louis, 2007: 133; see also the literature review by Dawson et al., 2017). To avoid continuing colonial processes of erasure and spatialised oppressions (Lipsitz, 2011: 3; Said, 1994), critical place research informed by Indigenous knowledge and methods posits that "Places are... not always justly named... are not fixed... [nor] understood by objective accounts." (Tuck and McKenzie, 2015: 14) Places both have and are practices (Deyhle, 2009; cited in Tuck and McKenzie, 2015: 14).

Decolonizing Suburban Research

The argument for place-based research is directly relevant to suburban researchers. The postcolonial reversal of the point of view suggests we look at suburbia not from the urban perspective as “less than the city” but from a decolonial perspective as a site partly hidden by dominant understandings. These mask the process of dislocation of what may have existed before a suburb was developed. Settler Colonial Studies highlights the displacement of people and erasure of signs of their presence and history. Suburbia is argued to re-enact colonial settlement by mirroring an anxious “escape” from threatening environments (Veracini, 2012). Combined with the forced “standardizing ideals of whiteness, masculinity, and Britishness” (Frew, 2013), the settlement process of suburbia takes on the spatial and social forms of separation. Consequently, the sociocultural “status” of people in Canada, for example, has been forced into three broad categories of “Canadians, Indians and Immigrants” (Thobani, 2007). This is played out in North American suburbia generally as “settlers” move in after developers have bought out or displaced previous groups, not to mention uprooting the existing ecosystem.

There are numerous examples of decolonial suburban research in the last five years. Keeler (2016) identifies an exclusion from home ownership that contributed to the absence of Indigenous families in post-war North American suburbs. “Eventually, in public memory and in public history, suburbs became white and the opportunity for envisioning suburban Indians was rapidly closed” (Keeler, 2016: 7). This absence is also reflected in the scholarship on these suburbs where Indigeneity became a blind spot. This lacuna buttressed in turn a blindness in other research fields toward the programs and policies of relocation of Indigenous peoples. This created not only a racialized geography, but the hidden historical layers create a historical geography. This space-time “topology” is characterized not only by “horizontal” dualisms such as core-periphery, urban-suburban and settled-natural but by “vertical” hierarchies of racial preference, structural racism and settler privilege.

This is part of a broader settler-colonial formation and topology that characterizes in different but similar ways both the United States and Canada. Coulthard argues, “through gentrification, Native spaces in the city are now being treated as *urbs nullius*—urban space void of Indigenous sovereign presence” (Coulthard, 2014: 176). These comments about urban space can be extended to suburbs which sometimes were developed through the forcible eviction of residents on the urban fringe. This is illustrated below in the case of Minneapolis-St. Paul's postwar expansion and the case of Winnipeg's redevelopment of Rooster Town.

Suburbia has previously been examined as a racial project (Vallejo, 2012; Weise, 2005; Sugrue, 2004). However, Keeler provides one of the only studies of “suburban Indians” that “brings Indian people to the centre of suburbanization” (2016: 8). Keeler and other critics (Keil 2013) note that in the past, many studies have been located within the stereotypical dualisms of the urban-suburban topology such as core-periphery, black-white or old and new. This includes identifying socioeconomic factors such as education and employment that contribute to access to housing and home ownership in general and in postwar suburbia specifically. Suburbs are often thought to be marked by higher rates of home ownership and/or the goal of home ownership, and as places that are “remade and repopulated throughout the twentieth century” (Keeler, 2016: 80) and up to today. Six cases illustrate decolonial and Indigenous studies of suburbia.

Case Studies

.1 Indigenous Suburbia: Minneapolis-St. Paul

In North America, the majority of all Indigenous people live outside of rural, reservation environments and instead reside in metropolitan areas; increasingly, these Indian people live in suburbs (Keeler, 2016:

9). For example, according to the 2010 United States Census, in Minnesota one fifth of individuals who identified as single race American Indian and 38 percent of those who identified as American Indian in conjunction with one or more races lived in a suburb of the major centre, Minneapolis and St. Paul. Despite federal Indian policies and housing policies that sought to first confine Indian people to reservations, or, in the case of Dakota people — to exile and later to relocate them to urban areas. Indigenous people have remained in or moved between suburbs (Keeler 2016:9).

The city-region of Minneapolis and St. Paul demonstrates “that the places we think of today as suburbs have much longer and complex histories as Indian places as well, a juxtaposition that should also be acknowledged rather than overlooked and, in many cases, erased” (Keeler, 2016: 19). The dominant understanding of North American suburbs is that they were produced through private speculative development of agricultural land aided by public financial and spatial zoning policies. However, the work of Keeler and the other researchers demonstrates that the expansion of North American cities necessarily involved displacement and exclusion of many residents with less power to benefit from the development process but often with no less claim on the land.

.2 Indigenous Veterans: Exclusion from American Suburbia

In the postwar United States until 1964, the Veterans Administration's *GI Bill* home loan program allowed returning soldiers to purchase new suburban houses with government guaranteed mortgages. However, other policies such as the *Termination Bill* (United States, 1953) and *Relocation Act* (United States, 1956) streamed Indigenous GIs and their families into inner city temporary rental housing (Keeler, 2016: 143). The objectives were to empty reserves and to assimilate Indigenous people in cities, extinguishing their status rights. Dominant, white Americans moved into suburbs, stripping city centre neighbourhoods of their middle-class constituencies. The precarity of inner city rental housing conditions worked against the purported objective of assimilation to produce long-term disadvantage and, in some cases, immiseration (Keeler, 2016: 146-7).

In Canada, there is a gap in research on housing and homelessness for Indigenous veterans. In a systematic literature review of this topic, only one paper was found to exist (Serrato et al., 2019). Changes to the *Indian Act* stripped those who had been away from reserves for four years of their Indian status. Most were required to renounce their status upon enlisting. As a result, returning Indigenous veterans of World War II no longer qualified for benefits under the *Indian Act* but faced discrimination under the programs of Veteran's Affairs (Sheffield, 2007: viii). For those who were able to maintain their status after the war, their pensions remained subject to administration by Indian Agents. This contradiction and double set of bureaucratic reviews and approval added challenges for Indigenous claimants (Sheffield, 2017: 71).

In addition, the Indian Affairs Branch decided to use the Canadian *Veterans' Land Act* (1970) to subsidize the Branch's overstretched welfare budget for on-reserve housing. While making houses available to veterans may have improved their quality of life in the short term, the program was intended to help veterans re-establish themselves in a livelihood that provided long-term stability (Sheffield, 2007: 49). Similar to the U.S., these programs reduced Métis and Indigenous families' ability to pursue postwar suburban housing, work and educational opportunities by sequestering them on reserves or allowing them only marginal participation in urban life.

.3 Erased Suburbs: Rooster Town, Winnipeg

In other cases, existing Métis communities were displaced as expanding suburbs brought aspiring families in contact and conflict with remaining area residents through schools as Peters has demonstrated (see Peters et al 2018; see also <https://roostertown.lib.umanitoba.ca>). Burley has researched the erasure of Rooster Town in 1959 (Fig. 1), a displacement that occurred on the southwestern fringe of Winnipeg,

Manitoba along a railway right-of-way. In Rooster Town, “Suburban anxiety was reinforced by a deeply embedded sense that Aboriginal people did not belong in the city and by a history of municipal efforts, from the city’s incorporation, to remove their visible presence” (Burley, 2013:4). Inexpensive land around cities appreciated in value due to speculation. Poor and racialized residents “moved into deteriorating inner-city neighbourhoods” as they were displaced by “upwardly mobile middle-income families...in pursuit of their suburban dreams” (Burley, 2013:4). Unable to find work or services in rural areas, Métis families moved to the urban edges. Denied title to their lands after the defeat of the 1885 Northwest Rebellion, they had been pushed into interstitial spaces such as public road allowances and excluded from public services including schooling. Métis inhabitants of the Prairies also did not have Indian status under the *Indian Act* making it easy to deem them squatters.

Harris (2004) notes other examples of suburban expansion that overran unplanned communities, whether squatters or Métis on legally subdivided land. These can be found in Hamilton (Bouchier and Cruikshank, 2003), Kingston (Osbourne and Swainson, 1988), Ottawa (Tomiak, 2016) and Vancouver (Manawi, 2003). Even in the 2010s, the area near Rooster Town has been the site of land conflict between environmental and Indigenous “land defenders” and developers who used what Wilt (2018) has called “Strategic lawsuits against public participation” (SLAPP) to pursue individuals. Cities and suburbs are sites of settler occupation and active colonial assimilation and cultural pressure. Suburbia has become a space of anxiety and non-belonging for many. An Indigenous participant in Nejad et al.’s study of Winnipeg comments, “I would probably feel less safe walking in suburbia...people are more skeptical or curious about you...” (Indigenous participant, female, interview 8 in Nejad et al., 2019).

.4 Municipal Colonialism: The Oka Crisis 1990

One of the best known recent clashes between Indigenous and developers was the confrontation at Oka, outside Montreal, Québec in March 1990. Members of the Haudenosaunee (Mohawk) Confederacy erected barricades to prevent the expansion of a golf course onto sacred land in Kanesetake. The Haudenosaunee claim the area, set aside as a Sulpician mission to the Indigenous, was the subject of a 1717 wampum belt agreement, but this has never been acknowledged by the Crown. Parts of the land were later sold by the Church to settlers and to the Town of Oka, west of Montreal (Fig. 5, for a detailed history see Morgan, 2018). A police assault to clear the barricade ended in the death of an officer and almost 3000 soldiers were deployed, one of the largest and most expensive military operations of the last 50 years. One of the main bridges into Montreal was blockaded and a 78-day standoff followed (Betasamosake Simpson and Ladner, 2010; see also Kanesetake Resistance Map 2018).

Stanger-Ross terms this “municipal colonialism.” (Stanger-Ross, 2008) The ‘Oka Crisis’ embroiled the entire state in a peri-urban land development and land use conflict over a golf course. This was a suburban confrontation (Simpson and Ladner, 2010) and a moment of interruption of the dominant settler colonial matrix. Coulthard (2015) argues that such eruptions of colonial violence must be understood as part of a cyclic pattern focused on maintaining Capital’s access to land and resources. Coercion alternates with more conciliatory moments (Epstein and Coulthard 2015), including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015).

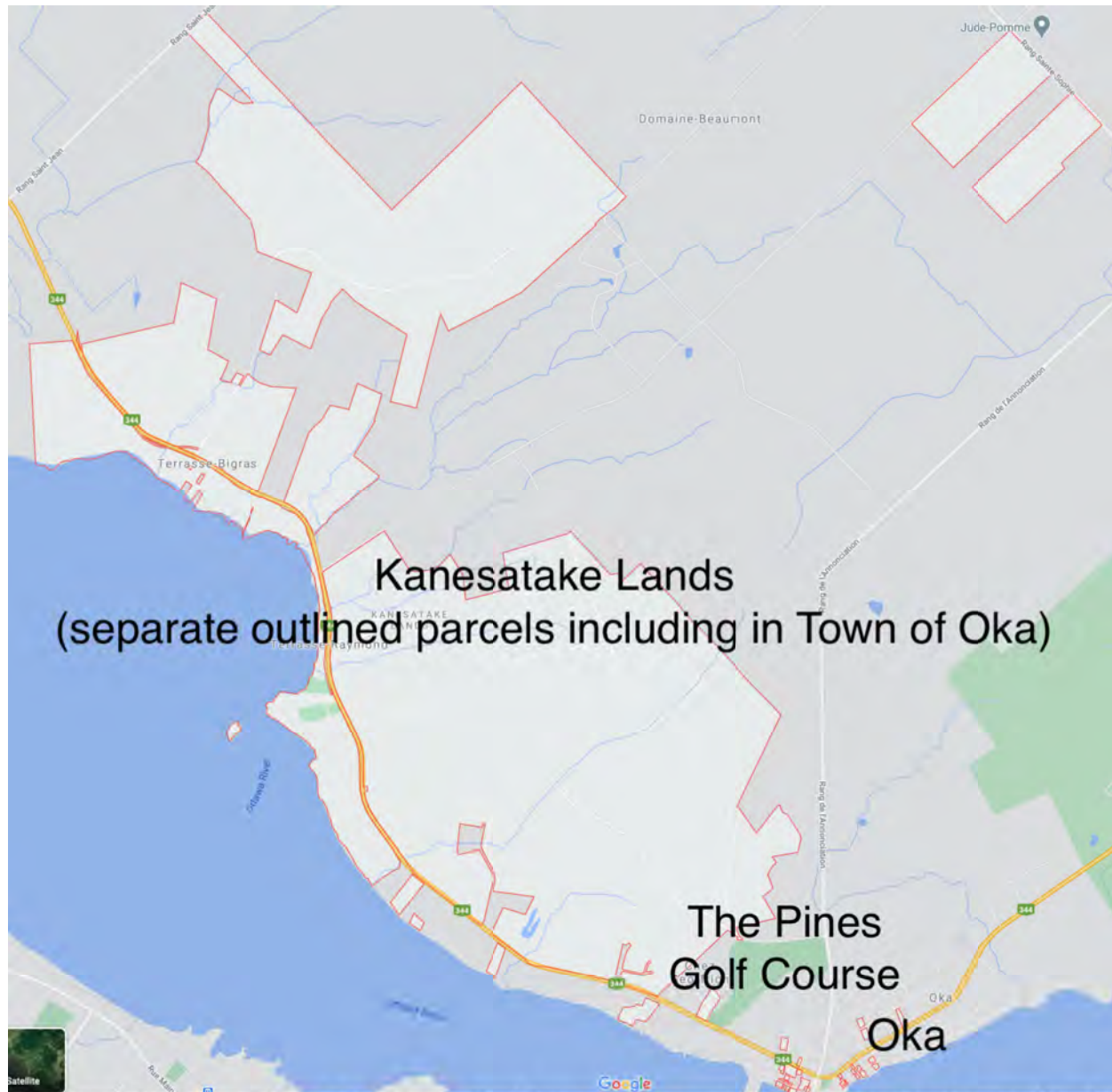


Figure 3. Map, Disputed Pines Golf Course lands between Kanesetake and Oka, Quebec (Google Maps).

Suburbs have been a point of intersection between the land development economy, the reproduction of labour and the dispossession of resources, lack of cultural recognition and the inequalities of domestic arrangements within families. Developers and the industries built around the expansion of infrastructure and cities depend on land being made available and underwritten by the State at an attractive price (Shields 2015). Suburbia is a site of both exclusion and the creation of not just a stereotypical 'suburban middle class' but of a domesticated, planned environment and range of modern citizens who are workers in a division of labour that is economic and sexual. Unsurprisingly, gendered tensions are felt in family roles and relations but are rarely put in the broader context of a place-based approach to the colonial matrix that is usually still theorized abstractly from above, at the scale of the State (Giraldo, 2016).

Coulthard argues that sexism and gendered violence are aspects of an ongoing colonial matrix (Coulthard 2015; Epstein and Coulthard, 2015).

.5 The Caledonia Land Dispute 2006

More recently in 2006, a residential development near Caledonia, Ontario purchased from the Province of Ontario was occupied. The dispute stems from a large tract granted by the Crown to the Six Nations of Grand River in 1784 for loyalty during the American War of Independence. Before a grant of legal title was concluded, the term of Frederick Haldimand, then Governor-in-Chief of British North America, ended. The Government subsequently interpreted the document simply as a licence to occupy the land. The leader of the Six Nations, Joseph Brant, insisted that the title to the land was absolute and sold parts off to prove this point. This disagreement has persisted to the present day. Government documents show that the land was surrendered in 1848, although the chiefs petitioned within 3 weeks time, arguing that they had agreed only to lease the land back to State control. When the Province of Ontario sold the land to a developer in 1993, the Six Nations started litigation against Canada and Ontario for an accounting of the land and money involved. The spring 2006 occupation was initially to raise awareness about this suit. The Ontario government quickly bought back the contested land to hold in trust until negotiations settled the claim. However, violence, damage and blockades of the main road followed, which disrupted emergency access to the town. In return town residents blockaded the same road separated from the Six Nations by police with fights breaking out and injuries. \$1.5 million Canadian in damage to a power substation led to local declaration of a State of Emergency. Blockages of the local highway and railroad have continued on and off since 2006 and the conflict became a local feud. New developments are proposed on nearby parcels of land and protests follow as the municipality has continued to support land development by approving subdivision and rezoning proposals. While there is little agreement on the facts, nor on their implications (Desjardins, 2017), a subsequent judgment in a \$20-million Canadian class-action lawsuit by residents and businesses found that the police failed to intervene to properly protect citizens.

In both Oka and Caledonia, there were two distinct systems of land tenure in conflict (Aaron, 2006). One is an Indigenous land right, even without a specific written deed that survives subsequent Government interpretations, encroachments and malfeasance. The other is rooted in the Provincial *Land Titles Act* guaranteed by the release of land by the Crown and with registered deeds recorded in Land Registries. Moreover, the most recent scholarship now speculates that Canada has two territorial sovereignties, a set of Indigenous sovereignties based on uninterrupted occupation and unextinguished claims (Russell 2017) versus the sovereignty of the Canadian state granted by the Crown (Nichols and Hamilton, 2019; Nichols 2019). Wampum belt treaties testify to the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty by the Crown, but Section 94 of the Canadian Constitution grants blanket sovereignty to the Government of Canada. The more powerful Crown system of title had steadily encroached on the Indigenous land for over 200 years. However, this historical conflict was exposed by the Caledonia proposal to develop over 200 houses, a relatively large proposal for the local area. The proposal for a suburban residential subdivision by the suburban land development industry brought the conflict out into the open. Even though the land is adjacent to a town, rather than a major city, it is accurate to understand this as a conflict about suburbia.

The Provincial government was unwilling to act to resolve the conflict and to reconcile the two systems of tenure and sovereignty. Government negotiators were not given mandates to negotiate, only to listen; mediators were never sought. As of 2019 the claim is still unresolved. The lead negotiator for the Six Nations, Haudenosaunee Chief Allen MacNaughton, commented in 2016 that “Canada hasn't learned much, the province hasn't learned much and neither has the municipality” (quoted in Moro, 2016). Previous models for negotiations have been unworkable because calling for the extinguishment of

Indigenous rights also demanded an extinguishment of cultural identity (Desjardins, 2017). There is a persistent gap in knowledge of the local history and understanding of others' points of view in these and other conflicts.

In the case of the Caledonia land dispute one can observe how different orders of the State play not only different roles but become the locus of colonial appropriation in different ways and at different times. While the Canadian federal government may be conciliatory (cf. TRC, 2015), the Provincial government is noncommittal and its police even withhold their full participation, perhaps mindful of past bloody confrontations in which the police forces were found guilty for the violence of individual members of the force. These two orders of government syndicate blame by attempting to 'pass the buck' to each other. However, the role of the municipality is less well examined. Small municipalities often have much less breadth and depth of expertise and rely on part-time councillors and local capacity without the benefit of consultants. The majority of their electorate is non-Native and thus it is unsurprising that Desjardins found at least one councillor who was categorized as in "strong support of non-native rights" (2017: 124).

The further significance of the Caledonia land dispute is that the costs of policing the standoff, litigating the class action and Six Nations suits, not to mention lost tax revenues and "compromised...imagination, vision and capacity for a bright economic future" (Desjardins, 2017: 84) in the area have been borne by the public taxpayer via the State (Nadler 2011). Despite the inaction of the Province and the multitude of ambiguities and disagreement over the facts, the developer was compensated to an extent through the repurchase of the land by the Province. Local Indigenous, area residents and builders have subsequently spent over a decade embroiled in continuing conflict.

.6 Settler Colonial Suburbia: Mill Woods, Edmonton

Despite these cases and our increasing awareness of many other smaller conflicts, there is a persistent sense of a lost history of previous occupation of the land that appears as much in names and local stories as it does in the uncanny absences of continuous and coherent histories of place. Mill Woods, a suburb of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, is situated on part of the historical land of the annulled Papaschase Indian Reservation 136 (Shields et al., 2019; 2020). The Reserve was created as part of *Treaty 6* in 1877. The Plains and Woods Cree, Assiniboine and other bands agreed with the Crown to surrender land in return for economic aid. By the early 1880s, most of its starving populace was induced to take 'scrip,' accepting payment to cede their Treaty rights.

A century later, parts of the annulled reservation was the site of an idealistic project to create a new suburb of affordable housing for workers and later immigrants. Now, almost fifty years after its founding, Mill Woods is home to an ethnically hyper-diverse population of over 80,000—with over 40% of residents identifying as a visible minority (Statistics Canada 2011)—defying stereotypical twentieth century North American suburb images of white, nuclear families. Local, white descendants of European settlers first populated the suburb, only to be replaced by an increasingly ethnically diverse immigrant population, cementing Mill Woods's character as a community of new settlers. In the second decade of this millennium, Edmonton has one of the highest proportions of Indigenous in its population. Over 1600 Métis live in Mill Woods (Andersen, 2009), but, similar to the Minneapolis-St. Paul case, few who are registered as Indians under the *Indian Act* (1985) reside there (Shields et al. 2020). Most First Nations Edmontonians live near the city centre and are in turn stereotyped as dependent on welfare services concentrated there. Zwicker argues that "colonialism literally changes shape over time, moving from a logic of exclusion ('Indian' reserves outside the city limits) to a logic of containment (inner-city poverty is disproportionately Indigenous)" (Zwicker, 2015:). Yet Mill Woods is dense with unexplained Cree names applied to streets, neighbourhoods and parks. These are interspatial traces of an absence that is still felt and legible.

Although Mill Woods is not a homogenous social or spatial unit and does not have a simple shared history, a focus on a spatial, socioeconomic and raced/ethnic definition of suburbs has distracted attention from the history of the sites themselves. This has excluded settler colonialism from suburban history. Research has tended to cast suburbs as history less and quintessentially modern. In the case of Mill Woods, this obscures both the differences of the modern suburb from the reservation and its similarities: tracts relatively isolated from not only subsistence but economic opportunities until the 1980s development of peri-urban industrial parks near Mill Woods.

The Papaschase peoples of *Treaty 6* participate in an oral history of the place which has different temporal dimensions from official Canadian history, stretching back much further and grounded in an unchanging sense of place. Alongside new immigrants, they unequally participate in the costs and benefits of development. The claims of the Papaschase and other Indigenous groups to this site are reasserted in recent “Idle No More” protests (CBC, 2013). Mill Woods is an example of accumulation by dispossession, obscured by a national historical amnesia and the rhetoric constructed by planning professionals and politicians.

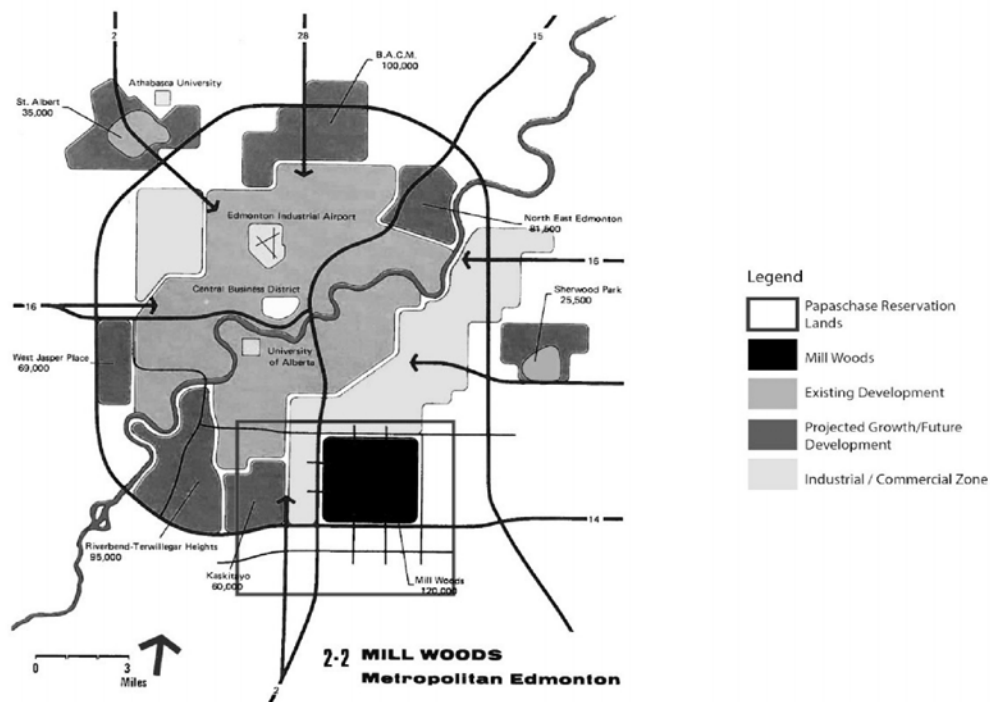
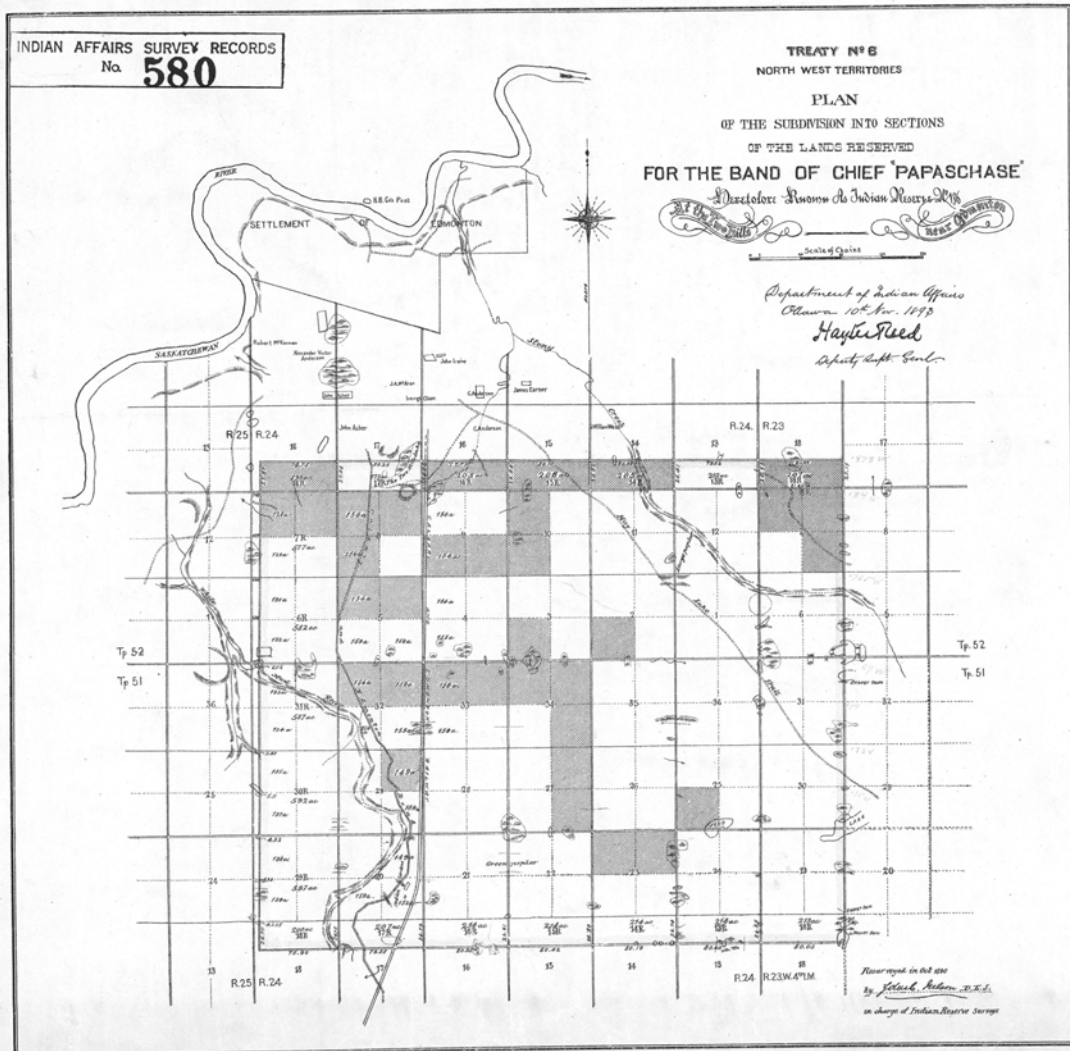


Figure 4. Mill Woods Development Concept, 1971 with Overlay of Papaschase Reserve Lands. (Map, Kieran Moran 2017)



*A Copy of this plan was sent to the
Registrar, Edmonton, N.W.T. 2nd Oct. 1899
7420102*

*Original Plan - To remain of record in the
Department of Indian Affairs
S. May 2, L.S.
29 Sept. 1899 Ch. Samuels*

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Figure 5. Papaschase Reservation No. 136 (Provincial Archives; see Library and Archives Canada, 1890). The current city of Edmonton extends north and south of the river and the historic settlement and trading post (marked H.B. Co's Post). The north-south railway line remains and marks the approximate centre line of the present-day city-region while the north edge of the proposed reservation marks the approximate east-west centre line. Mill Woods was developed from the 1970s overlapping the southeast quarter of the proposed reservation.

Interspatial Methods for Settler Colonial Suburbia

These examples raise the question of how to research the layered past of both migration and displacement that has been both erased and forgotten but may still haunt suburbs in the form of street names, parks and neighbourhood toponymy (Boyd and Thrush, 2011: xx). We can draw on the ethnographic and discourse analysis insight that it is essential to attend to what is not expressly said in any text. Inconsistent and puzzling presences and absences found in maps, archives and actual places provide the opportunity for an immanent critique that produces questions about a place. The suburban cases reviewed in this chapter show how

different orders of government, working at different scales, also have contradictory stances. The examples illustrate the importance of developing approaches that can work with and in spite of ambiguity and contradictions where there is no agreement on the historical or present facts.

One research method is to compare present-day site visits with historical maps, photos and other representations of the area found in archival sources (see the maps of Millwoods and the Papaschase Reserve Fig. 5 and 6) and newspaper descriptions at the time of *Treaty 6* adhesion in the 1870s with planning documents at the time of the creation of Mill Woods in the late 1960s. Maps can be read for shared sites: overlaying historical surveys and present-day maps makes the common areas between these materials easily discernible on visual inspection. This also highlights the disappearance of local place names and changes to landscape features. Keeler (2016) followed hundreds of specific Indigenous family names enumerated in historical records of Minneapolis-St. Paul through to present-day records to show the persistent presence of Indigenous people. This effort to trace historical continuity is a method to contest the spatial and experiential and spatial everyday understanding that sees suburbs as a radical break with the past.

Zwicker et al. (2015) refer to tracing both continuity and ruptures as ‘remapping,’ but this risks recolonizing knowledge with a single new and authoritative map. Instead, it can be useful to put present-day experience (of absence) and the historical times of suburbs into a topological relation—to consider both the geographical and historical changes (Tuck and McKenzie, 2015). If a remapping is successful, the “[t]he task is not to recover a static past, but to “acknowledge the power of Native epistemologies in defining our moves toward spatial decolonization” (Goeman, 2013: 3-4 cited in Tuck and McKenzie, 2015: 135). A decolonial plurality is preferred to forcing any of these narratives into one oversimplified statement of facts. For example, creating a reductive economic analysis ignores the importance of cultural recognition. Instead an inclusive approach provides the research basis for political and cultural processes of engagement by communities.

Donald uses a metaphor of the artistic concept of *pentimento* for this: “[t]he history of Aboriginal people before and after contact with Europeans has been ‘painted over’ by mainstream interpretations of official history...however, Aboriginal history and memory have begun to show through the official history of Canada” (Donald, 2004: 23). We might think of this as recognizing and researching both horizontal and vertical geographies. For example, not just core and periphery but also the history of the suburban site itself and its layers of residents and occupants.

Oral histories and gathering of further visual and archival materials could tell more inclusive stories of the diversity of suburbs and other places. A decolonial research method might interview and gather Indigenous and migrant community histories or popular narratives. It might rebalance our understanding of the intersecting human and non-human roles in the local ecology. This may repopulate the space with en-placed local stories that could potentially combine into a new, clear-eyed knowledge of the place, a re-spatialization of suburbs. Informal sources, oral histories and ephemera are valuable to understand the suburban areas of North America that articulate city to country, urban to rural, and one entire set of powers and land uses to another set.

Conclusion

There is much scope for queer, feminist, Indigenous and settler interrogation of the legacy of colonialism, even in -- especially in -- suburbia as a built form and dominant cultural site in North America (see e.g. Lugones 2012). The significance of Indigeneity, migrancy and ethnicity for North American suburbs as social spaces is poorly captured by the transportation, density and infrastructural categories conventionally used in discussions of the “suburban.” The legacy of the State's treatment of Indigenous people is emblematically reflected in the examples of suburbs as settler enclaves. Colonial strategies of displacement of Indigenous peoples have created the spaces of these suburbs, in which few Indigenous people reside. Indigenous responses in

the form of First Nations land title claims, civil unrest, and violence respond to the ongoing “discursive management” of the “indigene” by settler cultures (Goldie, 1989). In recent years, Canadian and American suburbs have experienced land title claims in the courts as well as civil unrest and barricades on their streets, golf courses and parks, resulting in disruption as well as death (Doucette, 2014). The entrenchment of land claims and the normalization of these struggles in legal and media culture indicates an ongoing justification by settler societies of the “dispossession, oppression, and effacement” (Goldie, 1989) of Indigenous peoples and a blindness to difference in the history of urban and suburban research and planning.

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1 The roots of postcolonial criticism stem from further back in the 1930s when critiques of relations with colonized societies appeared, notably in French language publications on the inequalities and cultural impacts of colonialism and struggles to decolonize Caribbean colonies and Algeria. The work of Aimé Césaire (1972; 1955) and Franz Fanon produced a diagnosis of the conflicted identity forced on colonized people summed up in Fanon's title *Black Skins, White Masks* (1986). Even further back, a lost forebearer of urban social geography, W.E.B. Du Bois developed statistical and interviewing methods to conduct studies of racialized communities in turn of the twentieth century suburbs in *The Philadelphia Negro* (Du Bois, 1967). Via the development of Cultural Studies in the UK by figures such as Stuart Hall (1981) and Homi Bhabha (1991), and the dissemination of South Asian intellectuals such as Ashis Nandy (1983) writing in English, issues of race, subaltern status and colonialism came to figure alongside political economic analyses of contemporary societies.