— PLACING PROPERTY: Theorizing the Urban from Settler Colonial Cities

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Abstract

In the conspicuously geographical debate between 'North' and 'South' urbanism, settler colonial cities remain displaced. They are located in the 'North' but embody 'South-like' colonial dynamics and are hence neither colonial nor postcolonial. Heeding the call to theorize from 'any city', this article aims to contribute to a more systematic theorization of the urban from settler colonial cities. In it we focus on the work property does to materialize the settler colonial city and its specific relations of power. We identify three faces of property—as object, as redress and as land—and use case vignettes from Israel/Palestine and Australia to consider how each register continues to inform the functioning of settler colonial cities. We find that, through property, dispossession and settlement are continuously performed and creatively enacted. At the same time, the performance of property reaffirms the endurance of Indigenous land systems amid ongoing colonization. The article makes a contribution to contemporary debates in urban studies about the importance of surfacing the specificities of urban experiences around the world, while further unsettling the dissociative nature of urban property.

An urban story

Meet Hasna and Ibrahim, a well-educated, professional couple, raising their three children in a spacious apartment of a modern high-rise in a central suburb of Karmiel, a Jewish city in Israel's western Galilee. They moved to Karmiel from their disadvantaged neighbouring Palestinian hometown straight after they married.

Hasna and Ibrahim's story[1] marks a growing trend in Israel for Palestinian citizens to move to Jewish areas (Hleihel, 2011; Sadeh, 2015).[2] It will sound familiar in the lexicon of classical urban studies: an upwardly mobile family moving from a poorer town to the nearby city to make a better life. But to leave that story in such common categories would miss its most important underlying dimensions, for Hasna and Ibrahim did not relocate out of choice. While their ability to migrate is certainly a function of class, the decision to move was driven by colonization, since there was no land available in their village for housing (personal communication, 7 December 2012). Palestinian citizens of Israel have faced a persistent and rapid shrinking of their lands since Israel's establishment in 1948 (Falah, 2003) due to a premeditated settler colonial policy aimed at converting land from 'Arab' to 'Jewish' (Yiftachel and Kedar, 2003; Forman and Kedar, 2004). Consequently, Palestinian lands are diminishing, and Palestinian towns are immensely overpopulated, underserviced and underplanned (Falah, 1991; Yiftachel, 1996), forcing many to seek alternatives in the structurally privileged Jewish towns (Hamdan, 2006: Blatman-Thomas, 2017a). For Hasna and Ibrahim, Karmiel is only partially their place of living: their familial ties, work and Arabic-language school for the children are all located in their hometowns.

1   Ethnographic excerpts from Karmiel are based on a doctorate fieldwork conducted by Naama Blatman-Thomas. Names and details of interviewees were changed to protect their anonymity.
2   Unlike Palestinian citizens of Israel, Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and sieged Gaza strip, *do not* enjoy the freedom to move inside Israel.

This snippet of a much broader trend reveals a quiet fissure in urban scholarship. While the urban literature is rich in studies about settler colonial cities like New York, Tokyo, Sydney, Auckland, Jerusalem and Sao Paolo, few scholars notice, much less *foreground*, their role as sites for expressing and actualizing colonial power. Important literature on the role of cities in advancing the colonial order surely exists (King, 1985; Hamer, 1990; Jacobs, 1996; and Edmonds, 2010a). Yet it seems that in urban scholarship, unless the central subject of study is colonialism itself, the colonial structure invariably fades from view. It is as if once 'passed', colonialism is no longer relevant to the understanding of urbanization and urban relations. Consequently, analyses of settler colonial cities that do not set out to be 'settler colonial analyses' often fail to make visible the underlying and prevailing relations of race, power and space and the settler colonial relations keeping them intact.

At the same time, the specificities of settler colonial cities remain obfuscated in current debates about postcolonial urbanism. We agree that different structures, experiences and everyday lives in cities are not mere variations on a universal form; we too advocate comparative and relational research committed to allowing any city to be a place from which urban life can be theorized (Robinson, 2006; 2016a; 2016b; McFarlane, 2010; Roy, 2016a, 2016b; Jacobs, 2012). Yet settler colonialism, as Veracini (2010; 2011) repeatedly asserted, is not colonialism and it follows that settler colonial cities are neither colonial, nor postcolonial (Hugill, 2017). In *settler* colonialism, the colonists and their colonizing processes came to stay (Wolfe, 1999), rendering necessary (if unattainable) the erasure of Indigenous lands and peoples as an ongoing project.

This leaves the particularities of the settler colonial relations of power, and their intrinsic link to urbanization, underarticulated (Porter and Yiftachel, 2017). Settler colonial cities are predominantly located in 'the global North' yet they embody distinct logics of colonialism (a 'South', so to speak). To theorize *from* settler cities thus demands foregrounding the particular spatial and social expression of settler colonial power dynamics.

Important steps have been made in this direction. The (now controversial) settler colonial theorizations of erasure (i.e. Wolfe, 1999; 2006; Veracini, 2011), are helpful in demonstrating that land, rather than labour, is at the centre of Indigenous–settler relations (Harris, 2004; Coulthard, 2014). They, moreover, examine how the accumulation strategies at the heart of these land relations are 'oriented to the enrichment of settler constituencies' (Hugill, 2017: 6), reminding us that the settler colonial order can never become 'post' because it is endlessly recomposed.

The *urban* condition under such logics yields specific consequences: entrenched racial land and property regimes, ongoing dispossession of Indigenous populations, denial of Indigenous sovereignties and their continued presence in the city and preservation of settler privilege in various forms. Further, urban centres large and small are the focus of generations of Indigenous struggles for land justice, recognition, and cultural survival. Evidently, erasure is a logic abridged by continued Indigenous presence and resurgence. Such dimensions reveal that the process of 'settling' Indigenous lands is contemporary, persistent and present. Settler colonialism is still creating its spaces.

Today, the violence of the urban frontier is refracted through increasingly marketized formations, pertaining especially to limited forms of recognition of Indigenous rights in the land. The entrenchment of settler colonialism via market operations has been recently analysed as 'neoliberal apartheid' (Clarno, 2017), 'neoliberalized settler colonialism' (Tomiak, 2017) and 'neo-settler colonialism' (Yacobi and Tzfadia, 2017), highlighting how neoliberalization, as a highly variegated process, articulates with projects of race, land and state. In this article we draw these areas of literature into conversation with contemporary debates in critical Indigenous and decolonization studies and urban theory in a conscious effort to begin the work of *theorizing from* settler colonial cities. This requires centring settler colonial processes

as the invisible yet powerful 'context of contexts' to complement existing analyses of the concrete and specific work that neoliberalized settler colonialism does in cities.

To do so, we focus on property. Analysing how property is performed and materialized reveals the potent work of settler colonialism in the urban context. We conceive three faces of property—as object, as redress and as land. In so doing, we elucidate the specificity of property in settler colonial cities, bringing it to the fore in our understanding of contemporary cities. The illustrations we use in this article stem from a range of ethnographic fieldwork episodes, close document analysis, secondary sources and the previous work of both authors in two settler colonial contexts: Australia and Israel/Palestine.

We offer these empirical accounts not as comparative cases in the conventional sense, but as lenses onto the distinct operations of settler colonial urbanism, where each opens additional possibilities for analysis. Our approach sits closely with the spirit of recent efforts in urban scholarship to reframe the 'architecture of comparison' (Robinson, 2016b: 6). When read 'through elsewhere' (Robinson, 2016b), the stories we present enable insights unavailable through conventional comparative tools. Such a philosophy eschews quasi-positivist concerns about the comparability of cases to instead 'embrace the important commitment to building understandings with the necessarily diverse content—the matter—of experience' (Robinson, 2016b:7). In so doing, the article seeks to make a contribution to the ways we think the urban by animating, instead of representing settler colonial urbanism, as it manifests through the concrete experiences of the stories we share.

The settler colonial context of contexts

'by making the contextual shift in analysis from the capital-relation to the colonial-relation the inherent injustice of colonial rule is posited *on its own terms and in its own right*'.
(Coulthard, 2014: 11, original emphasis)

In the past 20 years settler colonial studies have become an immensely prolific field (Wolfe, 1999; 2016; Veracini, 2015). Theorizations of this specific relation of power illuminate that settler colonialism is driven by the will to replace existing (Indigenous) social orders with another (settler) social order through means of violence, coercion, dispossession and control. Or as Patrick Wolfe (2006: 388) succinctly put it: 'Settler colonialism destroys to replace'.

Hegemony, in such a context, manifests where the 'working of power is premised on structural, impregnable, exclusion' (Yiftachel, 2009: 255), yet sustains a drive to dominate the peripheries of that exclusion through incorporation. There is, then, a toxic mix of exclusion, assimilation and co-optation engineered through settler colonial relations (Wolfe, 2016). At the same time, these forces 'lack the intention, will or capacity to incorporate colonized groups' (Yiftachel, 2009: 255). This is the 'constitutive outside' (Mouffe, 2000) of settler colonialism—its fundamental antagonism that is always ready to emerge into active political consciousness and subjectivity. We follow a Gramscian perception of antagonism, which surfaces when 'the presence of the Other prevents me from being totally myself' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 125).

The geography of this dynamic is tremendously important, for, as Massey (1995: 285) once remarked, 'spatiality is ... implicated in the accomplishment of difference and identity'. The usurpation of Indigenous lands occurs through distinctive tropes, institutions and practices that coordinate occupation of space and claims to it on specifically racialized terms. While this, of course, produces colonial relations across all spaces of encounter, urban settlements represent a particular intensity of property relations and built form that, we argue, works creatively to sustain the conditions

of settler colonialism. Urban landscapes are emblematic of the logic of replacement. Beyond their physical displacement and socio-spatial marginalization, Indigenous people have undergone vast symbolic dispossession, which has left them essentialized as non-urban while imposing structural limitations on their ability to assert their sovereignty in urban contexts (Edmonds, 2010b).

This process of physical and symbolic removal, which Coulthard (2014: 176) has called 'urbs nullius', represents the persistent and belligerent transformation of cities into purified settler spaces. Settler presence becomes naturalized in the colonized territory (Veracini, 2011; Strakosch and Macoun, 2012) under the guise of a new nation state (Elkins and Pedersen, 2005). Indeed, the reformation of territory through urbanization is a major signifier of that process. The urban landscape thus becomes a *fait accompli*, or seemingly fully 'settled' (King, 1985; Blomley, 2004). At the same time, Indigenous people have been variously invited, forced or cajoled into urban spaces over the course of settler colonial histories (Blatman-Thomas, 2017b) such that the current demographic profile of Indigenous peoples in most settler colonial countries is predominantly urban. The city's role as a so-called 'pinnacle' of civilization thus becomes a key site in the settler colonial policy of assimilation.

The distinctiveness of this creative process of organizing and coordinating land arrangements and social relations highlights the importance of empirical accuracy about what urbanization does. Urban spaces in settler-colonies are intense sites of dispossession and central components of assimilationist policies, revealing how the settler colonial city depends on a strategy of 'dispossessory conditional inclusion' of Indigenous peoples. Cities are also key spaces for Indigenous resurgence and struggle. These dimensions emphasize that cities are vital spaces from which to consider the politics of Indigenous–settler relations. Yet the distinct colonial contexts of 'ordinary cities' (Robinson, 2006) are too rarely brought into view.

In thinking about the specificity of settler colonial urbanism, this article places two settler colonial states, Israel/Palestine and Australia, alongside each other. This warrants some clarification. Australia is often regarded as an epitome of settler colonialism and one of the first sites from which settler colonial theory emerged (*cf.* Wolfe, 1999). Israel/Palestine, on the other hand, has more recently become central in settler colonial interpretation (Gordon and Ram, 2016; Svirsky, 2016; Clarno, 2017; Yacobi and Tzfadia, 2017; al Khalili, 2018; Busbridge, 2018; Luz and Stadler, 2017), to some extent from within critical urban theory (Yiftachel, 2009; Porter and Yiftachel, 2017).

Two differences (though others surely exist: Busbridge, 2018) between our study locations are worth highlighting. First, while we are able to make distinctions between past frontier and present reconciliation modes of colonization in Australia, Israel remains actively engaged in overt acts of colonization. Consequently, Israel does not recognize its settler colonial heritage and is not preoccupied with 'reconciliation' or 'recognition' politics, in the same way as Australia. Second, the Indigenous status of Palestinians remains bitterly disputed by the state of Israel. While Palestinians increasingly self-identify as 'Indigenous' (Jamal, 2011; Rouhana and Sabbagh-Khoury, 2015), and although some recognition has been granted by UN authorities of Bedouin-Palestinians as Indigenous (Yiftachel *et al.*, 2016), Israel's formal standpoint is that the Jewish people returned to their ancestral land; that they are, therefore, 'Indigenous' to the land. Below, we honour Palestinian claims to Indigeneity but are mindful of the different meanings that exist between Israel/Palestine and Australia.

Notwithstanding their differences, both places are undeniably settler colonial (Wolfe, 2016), sustaining an order that 'justifies its operation on the basis of the expectation of its future demise' (Veracini, 2011: 3).[3] This is already strongly evident in

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3   In the context of Israel/Palestine, such a promise has only ever been voiced with regard to the 'temporary' occupation of the Palestinian territories.

countries like Australia where discourses of recognition and reconciliation mark efforts to 'lay to rest the ghosts of ... discrimination' that haunt their societies, as an Australian political leader once put it. The re-writing of past events within this 'script of "moving forward"' (Edmonds, 2016: 17) makes colonization allegedly irrelevant as an organizing logic of the state, thereby obfuscating the continued effect of colonial dispossession on Indigenous peoples (Coulthard, 2014). The colonial present (Gregory, 2004; Veracini, 2015) thus becomes invisible, enabling settler colonialism 'to entrench and sustain itself' (Strakosch and Macoun, 2012: 53) through its proclaimed erasure.

Yet, this invisibility is at the same time quite contradictory to the creative demands of any nation state and, as we later show, to some of the innate tendencies of cities. Settler nation building remains structurally incomplete (Ford, 2013). The continued resistance of Indigenous peoples (Watson, 1997; Alfred and Corntassel, 2005; LeFevre, 2013; Simpson, 2014; Svirsky, 2017) necessitates the maintenance and legitimation of settlement through the constant crafting of national identities (Moran, 2002; Busbridge, 2018). Settler colonialism must therefore remain creative, even as it works to maintain its invisibility. This is especially true for cities as emblems of modern accumulation and agglomeration. An important dimension of this creativity has been the way that neoliberal urbanism is re-forming systems of settler colonial rule (*cf*. Clarno, 2017; Tomiak, 2017).

These two elements—*invisibility* and *creativity*—constitute the paradox of settler colonialism and pervade settler colonial cities. Following Mouffe (2000), we argue that neither total invisibility nor total creativity are structurally possible and that the existence of these two logics within the same system is what enables it in the first place. Invisibility and creativity are not simply dialectical to each other but rather constitute a structure of 'radical undecidability' (Mouffe, 2000: 12). Complete invisibility is impossible and, from the perspective of settler power, undesirable since it would lead to the *actual* demise of the colonial order—to decolonization as such (Strakosch and Macoun, 2012). At the same time, all-embracing creativity is impossible and undesirable, for pure creation would perform settlers into invaders and thus, outsiders in 'their own' home. Settler colonialism relies on the promise of its own demise and the naturalization of settlers' presence, such that the perpetual creativity of settler privilege itself must remain inconspicuous.

The 'structure of incompleteness' articulated through the invisibility–creativity nexus informs our analysis, which we advance by examining the concept of property. Property is a prominent tool of settler colonialism's logic of replacement. It works in highly creative, yet fundamentally invisible ways in the service of securing possession (Moreton-Robinson, 2015), through discursive tropes, legal mechanisms and violent force. In settler colonial cities, property is materialized, performed and objectified in a way that always seeks to possess, and in so doing to dispossess, appropriate and settle (Blomley, 2014). The unique context of settler colonialism emphasizes the naturalization of white possession as an already foretold stage in global development. While the appetite to possess is always present in any colonialist or capitalist project, that appetite is sharpened—and delimited—by the need to *naturalize* settler presence and occupation.

In a straightforward Gramscian sense, the occupation and possession of Indigenous land by settlers fundamentally symbolizes the 'non-being' of Indigenous people—the erasure that settler colonial studies suggest is its underlying logic. By physically and discursively occupying place, settler colonialism attempts to physically and discursively erase Indigenous land:

> For the settlers, Indigenous peoples are in the way and, in the destruction of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous communities, and over time and through law and policy, Indigenous people's claims to land under settler regimes, *land is recast as property* and as a resource. Indigenous peoples must be erased, must be made into ghosts (Tuck and Yang, 2012: 6, emphasis added).

Yet because Indigenous peoples, laws and lands survive and fight back—settler colonialism is by definition never fully complete—the work that property does to uphold settler possession requires perpetual creativity. The unique logic of settler colonialism is made real, at least in part, through property, and this creative effort is as much at work today as it was in the moments of first contact.

Examining property as a persistent and central organizing logic in settler colonial urbanization enables a sharper delineation of what difference it makes when commodification and neoliberalization occur through an underlying structure of settler colonial incompleteness. The market logics of neoliberalism are, of course, present, visible and felt, and contribute to a restructuring of settler colonial relations of domination as Clarno (2017: 13) identifies. Yet the persistent requirements to settle and *maintain* settlement demand a form of analysis that reveals how these dimensions articulate together. This requires a shift in emphasis to enable the colonial relation to come more completely into view. Such a shift, as Glen Coulthard (2014: 15) clarifies, foregrounds 'the ongoing effects of colonial dispossession [but] in no way replaces questions of distributive justice or class struggle; rather, it simply situates these questions more firmly alongside and in relation to the other sites and relations of power that inform our settler-colonial present'.

We consider settler colonial relations of property in three moves: as object, redress and land. We focus not on historical eras, but on the contemporary performances of property in settler colonial urbanization. As an *object*, property operates in mundane forms, turning land into severable commodities and doing the creative, yet often invisible work of dispossession. Those objects of property are sometimes offered back to colonized people as a form of *redress*. In this instance of settler colonial creativity, colonial relations of domination and dispossession are reduced to socio-economic disparities 'remedied' by the object that enacts the dispossession in the first place. Through the settler colonial structure of incompleteness, we are able to discern a third register, which we name, property as *land*. This register is of a different order than object and redress because it sharpens and surfaces the structurally antagonistic relations between settlers and Indigenous peoples. We follow Mouffe's (2000) conceptualization to suggest that these antagonistic relations persist despite the operationalization of property as object and as redress; in the absence of a legitimate place to reside, the activation of property as land engenders antagonism.

Property as object

'Property' generally conjures a mental image of ownership and housing. In (colonial) liberal states such as Australia, this mental alignment of property with real estate is so powerful that the whole concept has come to encapsulate a commonsense, mundane bundle of rights that people hold toward an estate. In these cases, property is both depoliticized and normalized; it is aimed at no-one in particular and available, in theory, to anyone. This conceptualization of property as object, however, warrants historicization.

In Israel/Palestine, the marketization of property is both newer and more limited in scope than in Australia. It is also spatially confined. While the market value of property was surely subordinated to Jewish ethnonational and settler colonial objectives at the time of Israel's establishment (property was not exchanged with Palestinians but generally emerged as an object within a purely Jewish real estate market), this is often no longer the case—particularly in cities. As studies from Israel demonstrate, Palestinian citizens are gaining greater access to individual Jewish-owned properties precisely due to the increasing influence of neoliberal logics (Rabinowitz, 1997; Yacobi and Pullan, 2014; Blatman-Thomas, 2017a; Totry-Jubran, 2017). While these dynamics are far less pronounced in non-urban communal settlements (Abreek-Zubeidat and Ben-Arie, 2014), and although they are met with considerable push-back on the part of

Jewish residents and municipal officeholders who contest the exchange of property as incommensurate with the national interest (Shafir, 2018), they nonetheless point to the increasing potency of property as object in Israel/Palestine.

As object, property is a useful lens for analysing other things, such as urban morphology or the functioning of housing markets. Yet property remains one of the fundamental mechanisms that operationalize dispossession. The work of grids, surveying, mapping, geographical boundaries, titling and land registration have all been the subject of analysis by excellent critical scholarship that has called attention to the work of property in effecting dispossession (Scott, 1988; Jacobs, 1996; Ryan, 1996; Blomley, 2003; 2004; Weaver, 2003; Banner, 2005; Porter, 2010; Graham, 2011; Yacobi and Tzfadia, 2017). In these ways, property coordinates the specific ordering of claims to space and place that we identify as having a distinctive import and intensity in settler colonial urbanism. Not only is property being wielded as a tool of dispossession in this formulation, but it also comes into being as an object. Property thus *becomes* the object in relation to settler subjects, emerging as the stable, severable thing that activates the familiar categories of ownership, exchange, control and belonging. In settler colonial cities, property as object appears as one mechanism through which settler colonialism produces the effects it names, remaking the world according to itself. This includes both public and private property where space is ordered through specific relations of occupation.

–   The Townsville case

The case of Townsville's Flinders Street Redevelopment Plan is useful for observing the aforementioned dynamic at work. Townsville is a small but regionally important city in Northern Queensland, Australia, with a large and diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, both permanent and transient. Many Aboriginal people come to Townsville briefly to access health and education services or due to involvement with the justice system.

Like the central areas of other regional Australian cities, Townsville's central city area experienced a deterioration in the 1990s, with suburban shopping malls leading to high vacancy rates of up to 30% (Townsville City Council, 2008a). Successive rounds of regeneration, including the pedestrianization of Flinders Street, failed. A new project was launched in 2009 to transform the street into a slow traffic artery to link the suburbs with the centre and historic port. The aim was to encourage more visitors and increase high-end retail to transform Flinders Street into a site comparable to great urban streets worldwide (Townsville City Council, 2008b: 1).

At a cost of $56 million, a five-year-long construction converted Flinders Street into a modern-looking urban district. Although many argue it has yet to fulfil its full economic potential, the boutique pubs, live music clubs and Sunday market are already attracting a larger and younger crowd. Furthermore, the redevelopment project was lauded by urban planners and architects for 'the broader spatial, geographical and economic context [that] informed the project' (Norrie, 2013).

Taken at face value, the Flinders Street Redevelopment Plan was directed at 'no one' and 'everyone' at once, namely, designed to benefit Townsville's entire community. Yet this was not quite the case, for another primary driver was the desire to solve what is seen as the 'problem' of Indigenous homelessness in the area (personal communication, 23 May 2016). Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who come to Townsville to access services sleep rough in the city centre, often because they have nowhere else to stay. There was significant pressure from non-Indigenous residents who wanted this Indigenous presence removed. This discourse became woven into the plan, with the Health Impact Assessment (HIA) of the project insisting that the redevelopment would help resolve 'anti-social behaviour in public spaces' (Population Health Queensland, 2008) and Townsville's Mayor at the time proclaiming

he 'expected itinerants would move away from the city [district] once the mall was complete' (Johnston, 2009).

Media reports from 2009 cast 'homelessness and anti-social behaviour in Townsville's inner city' as a 'clash of cultures and lifestyles' (Skene, 2009), unequivocally linking the redevelopment plan with white anxiety about Indigenous people sleeping outside. Accompanying the plan was a regulation to ban public sleeping in the downtown area after 6 pm. A number of proposals were drafted to remove street dwellers, including a plan to build two complexes of 'semi-permanent tents and huts' (*Townsville Bulletin*, 2009) to house itinerants, to be located in places with a high concentration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Eventually Townsville City Council initiated, and still funds, a bus that picks up people sleeping rough and under the influence of alcohol and transports them to an overnight sobering up facility in a northern suburb. Rough sleepers are returned to the streets the following day. While this is not a mandatory trip, and noting that many choose to use the service to access a warm shower and a meal and avoid police harassment, the different aspects of the revitalization plan can be read as a strategy to clear the urban centre of Indigenous itinerants.

The Flinders Street Redevelopment Plan itself was not articulated in racial terms; property emerges here as a creative force intrinsic to urban capitalism. Yet the plan was clearly directed at a specific racialized subject. What, then, sets settler colonial creativity apart from similar urban development efforts worldwide, which likewise disregard or indeed target disadvantaged groups? That is to say, what makes this story of Townsville different from a standard story of gentrification and urban exclusion?

The process of Australian urbanization has always sought and required the removal or rearrangement of Indigenous presence (Johnson, 1994; Jacobs, 1996; Edmonds, 2010b). Yet in settler colonies it is not just the 'types' of bodies being displaced that matters, but also the form of their occupation of place (*cf*. Abu Saad, 2008; Prout and Howitt, 2009). The case of the Flinders Street Redevelopment Plan demonstrates that the 'itinerant' presence of Aboriginal people is being targeted since it cannot be assimilated or marketed. As Irene Watson (2009: 39) clarified in another urban context:

> Aboriginal spaces such as Sydney's inner city suburb of Redfern do not promote the image of the exotic Aboriginal and do not attract tourists. So, when not performing as the exotic being, the unsettled native is removed from land … and is also further alienated by the market premium on 'authentic' Aboriginal being. The Redfern community and others like it are not protected, and Aboriginal housing is instead sold for large profits in the booming Sydney property market. The effect is to create a contemporary wave of dispossession.

The insistence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on occupying the streets of downtown Townsville 'their own way' draws attention to the racialized definition of the 'public space' in settler colonial cities. The creativity of settler colonial capitalism is imbued here with additional meanings and effects as it manufactures propertied landscapes that are always *principally* dispossessory. We can then discern how the politics of dispossession threads into the politics of accumulation specifically to override the claims of Indigenous people to the city, even as it obscures the modes of doing exactly that.

Property as redress

Property as redress operates within the realm of the liberal politics of recognition (Coulthard, 2014) to assuage Indigenous grievances. It speaks a civil rights language in proclaiming colonialism as past or 'extinguished'. Redress, like recognition, is 'an idiom in which struggles for political and social justice are articulated' and yet 'thoroughly imbricated with relations of appropriation and ownership' (Bhandar, 2011: 228).

Property as redress thus contributes to the creation of governable Indigenous subjects at the same time that it deepens their dispossession (Povinelli, 2002; Coulthard, 2014).

Redress can be granted in one of two ways: through a proactive step of state recognition or passive enabling by the state in response to external pressures. The first acknowledges Indigenous difference and the second emphasizes sameness to the dominant culture. Recognition of difference in liberal philosophy takes much inspiration from Hegel's model of the lord and bondsman, according to which 'the emergence of self-consciousness involves a process of negation, sublimation and transcendence, always in relation to another' (Bhandar, 2011: 229). Taking Hegel's point of mutuality as emblematic to recognition, Franz Fanon (1967) asserted that, in a colonial context, the lack of any mutual space between colonizer and colonized makes the struggle for recognition virtually impossible.

In the face of this impossibility, however, recognition has become one of the primary battlefields upon which Indigenous people articulate their demands, which are premised on difference and particularity. Coulthard (2014: 26) suggests this is partly due to the dynamic identified by Fanon where colonized peoples develop 'psycho-affective attachments' to master-sanctioned forms of relation. When settler colonial states transition from enacting 'a more or less unconcealed structure of domination to a form of colonial governance that works through the medium of state recognition and accommodation' (Coulthard, 2014: 25), this psycho-affective attachment inculcates certain kinds of politics. One of these, we argue, is property as redress.

Broad forms of redress for land dispossession have been developed in many settler colonial states in the past 30 years. An excellent example is that of native title in Australia. In 1992, the High Court of Australia made a historic decision in what is known as the Mabo case, recognizing that there were land laws in place prior to British occupation and that Indigenous peoples' title possibly survived colonization. Thus, forms of what is now known as native title can be recognized in places where it has not been extinguished and according to state-imposed criteria (Brennan *et al*., 2015). In response, the Federal Government and all States and Territories passed legislation that provides means for Indigenous people to claim ancestral land under certain conditions.

This historic shift in Australian land law, recognizing an Indigenous form of tenure defined within non-Indigenous legal parameters, has had bitter-sweet outcomes. While land has been returned to many Indigenous communities, with over 30% of the continent now under the control of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples (Altman and Markham, 2015), most of that land is in remote areas. Overall, the effects of the native title regime have been far from emancipatory for most Indigenous Australians (Brennan *et al*., 2015; Watson, 2015).

One of the most significant *urban* outcomes of native title legislation to date is coming to pass over the city-region of Perth, capital of Western Australia. The Noongar Nation struck a controversial settlement with the Western Australian Government in 2015, the implementation of which is currently being put into legislative place. The settlement comprises recognition through an Act of Parliament that the Noongar people are the traditional owners of the region,[4] as well as a package of land and benefits amounting to approximately A\$ 1.3bn (McCagh, 2014). A highly complex settlement (see Kelly and Bradfield, 2012; 2015; McCagh, 2014; Cox *et al*., 2016), its outcome will see freehold and some reserves land transferred to the Noongar people in exchange for the extinguishment of their native title over the rest of their traditional territory. Indeed, the requirement to agree to extinguishment of native title caused significant controversy within the Noongar Nation itself. While the settlement was advocated by the lead

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4   A 'traditional owner' refers to a person descended from the people of the local area who bear specific rights and responsibilities in relation to that area. The term is commonly used in Australian public discourse and Indigenous politics to signify the different rights status between people from local descent groups and other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people living on that land. The term has specific legal meaning in the context of native title.

negotiators as a 'vehicle to progress the aspiration of the nation' (Kelly and Bradfield, 2012: 15), others read it as a very limited compensation package for the termination of their rights across a vast territory.

Native title as a form of state recognition of Indigenous rights to land is articulated in a language of difference (Motha, 1998; Coulthard, 2014). To be recognized, native title claimants must prove that they are descended from the people of that land, have maintained a continuing connection to their lands since the time of colonization and continue to observe their traditional laws and customs. The content, then, of native title, is importantly tied to the laws and customs of the specific native title holding group.

At the same time, this recognition cements a sameness by defining Indigeneity within a suite of liberal expectations (Povinelli, 2002). Land rights become property as redress through the expectation that Indigenous people will perform a specific and unified relationship to land, which is articulated similarly to liberal concepts of ownership; the materiality of land must exist separately from the subjects whose rights are recognized. In this sense, property as redress is not only offered, but is offerable precisely because of the expectation that the modes of 'being propertied' follow the ontological separation between space and those who possess it. Property is always, in this view, an innocent and even affirmative object. This expectation of the state operates to subvert, if not disable, heterogeneity between and within Indigenous groups (*ibid.*), as well as alternative ontologies of being in and with the land (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). Offering property as redress ensures that identities are 'given space to be different' without threatening the dominant national order.

In Israel/Palestine, the recognition of sameness (albeit always structurally limited, Rottenberg, 2008) operates much more explicitly to obfuscate racial, ethnonational, cultural and class differences. Faced with growing housing pressures in Palestinian towns in Israel, as sketched above, the state is compelled to enable Palestinians to purchase or rent properties that were originally designated for Jews. The terms of this politics are simple: as middle-class homeowners in Jewish cities, Palestinians sufficiently resemble their Jewish neighbours, which affords them property as a form of redress. This is articulated as a liberal, civil right that demands no specific or proactive act of recognition by the state. Instead, the real estate market is mobilized to soften the effects of the antagonistic relations of belonging between Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis (Rabinowitz, 1997).

Palestinians are granted the ability to buy a house in a way that renders them similar enough to Jewish homeowners (Yacobi and Pullan, 2014).[5] This transaction obfuscates the entrenched colonial structure that delimits access to land and property in Israel/Palestine. This type of redress is not instigated by an acknowledgement of distinct needs or cultural imperatives, but by neoliberal imperatives and the state's desire to preserve its image as a 'democracy'. While the state surrenders some of its property to its Others, it gains legitimacy without fundamentally jeopardizing its ethnonational hegemony and importantly, the terms of its possession.

This discussion may suggest that state recognition always operates as a tool of co-optation and appropriation. Over this difficult question there will continue to be heated debate. Yet given its tangible outcomes, the field of recognition cannot be altogether negated (*cf.* Porter and Barry, 2016). Recognition can be powerful in improving the lives of Indigenous people in general, and in settler cities in particular, for instance by offering opportunities for upward mobility to members of repressed minority groups. Moreover, state forms of recognition have the potential to reduce the precariousness of individuals and communities.

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5   Nonetheless, purchasing a house as a Palestinian in a Jewish neighbourhood or city can generate conflict and objection. The state may try to prevent the move through legal measures (Tzfadia and Yacobi, 2011), or it may be the Jewish public that resists it (Sadeh, 2015).

Yet, as Judith Butler crisply explains, many forms of recognition, such as property as redress, problematically identify recognition with 'injury':

> There is a difference between calling for recognition of oppression in order to overcome oppression and calling for a recognition of identity that now becomes defined by its injury. The problem with the latter is that it inscribes injury into identity and makes that into a presupposition of political self-representation. As such, injury cannot be recast as an oppression to be overcome (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 87).

To use Butler's distinction, property as redress does not amend oppression, nor does it acknowledge the settler state's own act of oppressing. Rather, property operates to alleviate injury, such as 'loss of land' or 'lack of housing', as in the case of native title or the enablement of home ownership to Palestinians, respectively. In that sense, property as redress is still an arena where difference is articulated within the constructs of the settler colonial value system, while reaffirming its possessory logics.

Property as land

Settler possession of Indigenous lands creates an impression of fatal effectiveness, especially as the project of transforming (Indigenous) land into (settler) property seems so comprehensive and final. Yet, as discussed earlier, settler colonialism is by definition structurally incomplete. While the appearance of fatal effectiveness is striven for in the very performance of property as object and as redress, it cannot be finalized. *Land* itself still exists,[6] as does that land's relationality to Indigenous laws and forms of belonging.

Conceiving of property as a relationship of belonging (Keenan, 2015), we see how property might transcend mere possession. All societies have relations to land that exceed mere possession or occupation. But the manner of that excess, its expression and manifestation are in a particular kind of conflict in a settler colony, because the difference being articulated through property as land *is not* occurring entirely within a dominant value system but in a semi-autonomous space outside of it.

Property as land thus expresses the fundamental antagonism that lies in the materiality of land and its specific relational ontology to different peoples that always exists in a settler colonial structure. Land refuses to be resolved via the invisibility of property as object, or the cunning promise of property as redress. Acknowledging this other facet of the settler colonial city helps tackle the problems inherent in the narrative of inevitable and comprehensive erasure for which settler colonial theorization has been criticized.

Indigenous scholars have been attempting to teach this to an unhearing Western scholarship for a long time: land is constituted quite differently in the world-views and laws of Indigenous peoples. For instance, Bedouin scholar Safa Aburabia (2015: 101–2) reminds us that Bedouin Palestinians regard land 'ownership' not as a commodity—selling one's land is 'an act of infamy' (Aburabia, 2015: 103)—but as the genesis of being. As such, a cultural distinction exists between those whose land ownership is derived from historical claiming (*hajajra*) and those whose lands were gained through the inferior act of acquisition (*mahjura*). This ontology of land deviates from European white possession where private ownership has become a defining feature of one's value. As feminist Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015: 11) writes, '[our] ontological relationship to land, the ways that country is constitutive of us, and therefore the inalienable nature of our relation to land, marks a radical, indeed incommensurable, difference between us and the non-Indigenous'.

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6   In the Australian context this is often referred to as *Country*, signifying the interconnected relationship of all physical and spiritual things to particular lands and waters.

Land under this conception is an ontological framework of relational being, an epistemology of place-based knowing and experience, and an ethics that is practised through what Coulthard (2014: 13) dubs, 'grounded normativity'. This is an ontology of land and belonging that performs a repertoire of *being with* and *coming from* a place, and in so doing, knowing, practising and imagining place as a relationship where place and subject constitute each other. Land is a material being that *through its being* creates the world and the subjects (human and non-human) of that world. It follows then that law 'comes from a place that lives inside the law, where the law is the land' (Watson, 2009: 42). For Indigenous sovereignty, property as land is corporeal, inscribed in and through Indigenous bodies and emanating from land in itself.

This ontology of land exists as an autonomous space, even despite the apparent conclusion of settler possession of that same land. Material manifestations of these ontologies are of course perpetually delegitimized and colossally squeezed by settler colonial structures of possession. This is even more brutal in urban environments, where the presence of the settler curtails Indigenous subjectivities and land ontologies most severely.

–   Indigenous claims

Returning to the case of the Noongar people's claim in southwest Western Australia and the city of Perth illustrates this dynamic. The deal brokered was for the Noongar nation to receive formal property title (object) as redress in exchange for the extinguishment of the remainder of their rights elsewhere. For some Nyoongar people, this deal failed the test of sovereignty,[7] representing a fundamental misrecognition of property as land. In protest, the Nyoongar Tent Embassy was established in February 2012 at Matagarup, near the city centre, as an explicit statement of the continuation of Nyoongar law, culture and sovereignty. The Nyoongar Tent Embassy was subject to extensive vilification in the media (Kerr and Cox, 2013) and numerous brutal evictions and police interventions.

In the Jewish city of Karmiel briefly mentioned above, a different simmering tension demonstrates the operation of property as land. In this case, however, Indigenous land has not yet been fully cast as (settler) property. Consequently, we can witness how the struggle to maintain the relationality of the land is still unfolding. Bounded within the city of Karmiel is the Bedouin village of Ramya. This village predates Karmiel's establishment and has basically remained in its historical location as the neighbourhoods of Karmiel gradually enveloped it. The residents of Ramya hold legal *tabo* (private ownership documents from the Ottoman regime) for their lands, but over the years many of their lots were taken by the state 'for public use' with some, albeit insufficient, compensation granted to their owners. Ramya's lands were transformed into high-rise buildings and expansive cottages for the urban upper class, while the community managed to hold on to a small territory that remains 'unrecognized' (read: delegalized) and deprived of basic infrastructure. The commitment to remaining on their historical lands (referred to in Arabic as *summud*) in a state of underdevelopment and amidst ongoing harassments and eviction threats stems from the extended family's connection to this territory.

Mounting pressure by the municipality and the Israel Land Authority (ILA) to accept an 'eviction and resettlement' proposal elsewhere in the city—rather than being evicted without alternative housing—brought the residents of Ramya to place a condition on their relocation. They called for a recognition of their collective needs and rights stating that the residents would move peacefully only if Ramya's (male) offspring were included in the settlement plan so as to ensure their ability to build houses for their future families within the same area. This condition is not simply a convenience; rather

7   See http://www.nyoongartentembassy.com/petition-against-the-native-title-offer1.html

than negotiating the *fiscal* value of the land, the residents are highlighting its *communal* significance, demanding recognition for a specific arrangement of land and people. As an Arab Member of Knesset proclaimed in a meeting between the parties in November 2015: 'If you [the ILA] are willing to recognize the uniqueness of the [Jewish] Haredic community, then you ought to recognize Bedouin communality as well'.[8] Land in this case represents and enables the familial ties that are at the core of Bedouin culture. Forced to 'take a deal', the Ramya community is not fighting for compensation but for the right to continue living as Bedouin in the(ir) city.

Ramya and Karmiel as 'city-subjects' struggle to be fully themselves in the presence of the other: Karmiel cannot be fully Jewish with Ramya at its urban centre, and Ramya cannot maintain its cultural kin practices without land of its own. Similarly, Nyoongar sovereignty and that of the Western Australian government exist in fundamental tension with each other. Although the options for more positive coexistence are surely present, Israel's entrenched settler colonial order cannot enable it and Australia's current regimes of recognition are designed to deterritorialize Indigenous rights and governance. Object forms of property as redress (possession of freehold in another location, access to reserve lands, title swaps, financial compensation, even transport out of town as in the case of Townsville) are offered as 'a fix', but these cannot obfuscate an enduring and underlying difference.

These small vignettes help expose the antagonism inherent in the clashing occupations of space by Indigenous people and settlers. That antagonism is not merely an outcome of the different occupations of space, but of the specific identities of the subjects occupying it, who remain entangled within settler colonial relations. Property as land reveals the ways that relations between people and place always exceed the narrow terms of possession and replacement that are elemental to settler cities. This lens can also be broadened to consider all people–place relationships as transcending, albeit differently, those narrow terms. Seeing the relationality of land as surviving and exceeding the narrowness of any property order offers some optimism, since if property is (still) land, then the city cannot be fully settled.

Conclusion: theorizing from settler colonial cities

Theorizing from settler colonial cities demands foregrounding the spatial and social expression of this specific colonial power dynamic. In this article, we have positioned settler colonialism, and its specific entanglement with neoliberal urbanism, as the invisible yet powerful 'context of contexts'. We then examined the operations of three faces of property in settler colonial cities: property as object, property as redress and property as land. We have argued that property is a primary logic underpinning settler colonial urbanism, for it is through property that dispossession and settlement are performed and creatively enacted every day. We showed how property is continuously enrolled as an object or as a form of redress that in turn maintain settler dominance over dispossessed lands. At the same time, land, as a 'field of relationships of things to each other' (Coulthard, 2014: 61), continues to surface the entrenched antagonistic relations intrinsic to settler colonial relations of power.

The concept of property as land brings to the fore these antagonistic relations in a way that clarifies the subject identities and practices that uphold them. Land in its relationality has not disappeared, but it remains obscured by the invisibility–creativity nexus so fundamental to the operations of settler colonial power, and the persistence of urban scholarship in overlooking and silencing this 'context of contexts'.

Thinking this way about property, race and settler colonial urbanism, we explore the possibilities that emerge from stretching possession outside of possessive logics, to paraphrase Roy (2017). Indeed, one way of going 'past possession' is by making

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8   Protocol of a discussion held in Nazareth, 12 November 2015. The full transcript is available from the authors.

present the persistent and highly localized dynamics of racialized (dis)possession inherent in settler colonial cities. Moreover, thinking through this other 'face' of property as land helps reveal the fundamental impossibility, or 'radical undecidability' of the geographies of settler colonial relations. Property as land viewed through the lens of the colonizing state registers the necessity of removing Indigenous Other(ness) because it is unsettling; it is a sovereignty that cannot be owned (Moreton-Robinson, 2011: 647).

Yet property as land also provides a more hopeful space, where the relationality of land exceeds the narrowness of property as object or redress. That land persists underneath and beyond the concrete of urban skyscrapers, reminds us that relations of belonging always exceed mere possession. Thinking through property as land assists in the important quest of unsettling the dissociative nature of property (see Porter, 2014; Roy, 2017) and its presumed placelessness, contributing a reimagined politics of emplacement. The article responds then to Roy's (2017: A3) urgent question: 'Can frameworks of racial banishment enable a decolonial and decommodified vision of land?' We suggest that a more precise grasp of the material realities of settler colonial urbanism holds a promise that the apparent irresolvability of settler colonialism might become its own possibility toward decolonization.

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