Challenging the Neoliberal Settler City: The Urban Aboriginal Strategy, the Politics of Displacement, and Indigenous Resistance
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Introduction
Urban areas in what is now Canada are located on Indigenous, often unceded, territories, and a large and growing number of First Nation, Métis and Inuit citizens live in cities (Statistics Canada 2008). Yet an active state politics of erasure and displacement continues to posit cities as white settler space through a politico-administrative nexus and dominant discourses that place Indigeneity in rural and remote areas. This paper problematizes the neoliberal settler city by showing how policy paradigms couched in the language of partnership further entrench the racialized spatial order of capitalism-colonialism.

While settler cities have been premised on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the exploitation of resources from Indigenous territories, they are rarely problematized in the literature as situated at the very core of the settler colonial project. When urban Indigenous realities are discussed, problematic assumptions and state categories are often reproduced, and structural relationships tend to be emphasized at the expense of empirical analyses that examine the struggles of Indigenous peoples.

Informed by a theoretical framework that draws on Indigenist scholars, feminist and anti-racist political economists, and radical geographers, my research seeks to contribute to a theoretically driven and empirically grounded inquiry into the relationship between state power, neoliberal governmentality, Indigenous peoples, and cities. A critical interrogation of the historical trajectory and spatial(izing) aspects of settler colonialism is crucial for understanding Indigenous community-building, nationhood, and resistance in urban contexts – and, most importantly, it opens up conceptual space for thinking about decolonization in an expansive way.

Examining the effects of neoliberal techniques of governance, I argue that Indigenous resistance to the settler state project of erasure, which has been pursued most aggressively in relation to cities, is not inevitably undermined by Indigenous collaboration with various levels of government. As Ferguson (2010, 183) notes in relation to the intent and actual outcome of governmental devices,

> [i]f we can go beyond seeing in "neoliberalism" an evil essence or an automatic unity, and instead learn to see a field of specific governmental techniques, we may be surprised to find that some of them can be repurposed, and put to work in the service of political projects very different from those usually associated with that word. If so, we may find that the cabinet of governmental arts available to us is a bit less bare than first appeared, and that some rather useful little mechanisms may be nearer to hand than we thought.

In order to understand the local and trans-local struggles of Indigenous peoples for self-determination in urban areas, I contend that we need to give serious consideration to the

new spaces and scales of urban Indigenous governance, their outcomes, and emerging possibilities.

Based on my dissertation research and interviews with 31 key informants[1], this paper highlights transformations in urban Indigenous governance in Ottawa and Winnipeg, with a particular focus on the horizontally and vertically networked partnerships created under the federal Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS). Attention to the empirical effects of these partnerships will help situate the complexities and contradictions of neoliberal governing arrangements.

This paper starts out with a sketch of the legal, administrative, political, and discursive strategies that have been employed to produce neoliberal settler cities in Canada. In the second section, a brief description of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) is provided. Given its prominent role in the new urban-Aboriginal-governance-through-partnerships paradigm, it is important to critically interrogate the UAS and situate it in continuity with, not as a departure from, federal "Indian policy". Finally, the paper turns to a discussion of how Indigenous leaders and activists are engaging with this neoliberal strategy of depoliticization and containment. While the UAS is intended to perpetuate the erasure of Indigenous peoples – as peoples with rights, jurisdiction, title, and sovereignty – Indigenous actors have contested its premise through a range of politics of emplacement, territorialization, re-scaling, and networking. I describe how, in effect, these new political arrangements are constantly being re-worked based on Indigenous agendas that contest the colonial-neoliberal logic of the UAS and assert Indigenous peoples' right to (be in) the city.

The Settler City as Displacement

The settler city has operated as a sociospatial technology of colonialism through a range of intertwined strategies of displacement, including evictions, population management, knowledge production, legal exception, social exclusion, and neoliberalization. However, colonialism has not been a static project (Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Veracini 2010), and the outline of the historical and contemporary processes that have positioned the city as a linchpin of settler colonialism in this section illustrates this. By the same token, the city is also a crucial site of decolonization. As Blomley notes (2004, 127), given "that the city is a site of particular ideological, material, and representational investments on the part of a settler society, native contestation has a particular valence here". In the last section of this paper, I will discuss Indigenous contestation further, but, first, I want to sketch how the re/production of the neoliberal settler city has marginalized Indigenous peoples from and in urban space.

The production of settler cities required the deterritorialization of Indigenous peoples and their relegation to spaces away from settler society. This entailed a radical reconfiguration of space through a series of violent processes which largely occurred in the 1800s and

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[1] The interviewees were selected based on their professional roles in Aboriginal service delivery agencies, community organizations, political advocacy bodies, and First Nation, federal, provincial, and municipal governments. The interviewees worked for local Aboriginal service agencies (12), local, regional, and national Aboriginal political organizations (8), a First Nation government (1), the City of Winnipeg (4), the City of Ottawa (1), Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Manitoba (1), and the federal government (4).

early 1900s, including the denial of Aboriginal title, the entrenchment of a private property regime from which Indigenous peoples were excluded, and the creation of the reserve system (Blomley 2003, 2004; Harris 2002, 2204). This large-scale remaking of geography and property has required both "historical amnesia" (Blomley 2004, 106) – conveniently forgetting that settler cities are on Indigenous territories, often in locations of pre-existing Indigenous settlements (Pitawanakwat 2008, 169) – and the ongoing erasure and marginalization of Indigenous peoples (Berg 2011).

Urban settler elites actively participated in and benefited from the displacement of Indigenous nations through evictions (Barman 2007; Harris 2002). Inventing the "Indian" was central to the project of disconnecting Indigenous peoples from their land and relegating them to reserves. In order to circumscribe Indigeneity in ways that served the purposes of colonial re-settlement, a range of legal processes variably constructed Indigenous subjects as outside of the law or as wards of the state, with tightly circumscribed rights restricted to spatio-temporal zones of exclusion (Monture-Angus 1999:30, 52; Thobani 2007, 48). Framed as "in the interest of the public", the Indian Act was amended in 1911 to facilitate the expulsion of First Nations from urban areas (Barman 2007, 5-6; Mawani 2005). In the debate in Parliament, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier summed up the prevailing ideology by stating that "where a reserve is in the vicinity of a growing town, as is the case in several places, it becomes a source of nuisance and an impediment to progress" (House of Commons Debate, April 9, 1911, cited in Barman 2007, 5). Discourses of dispossession as "progress" have thus served to reinforce the appropriation of physical space (Furniss 1999; Sluyter 1999).

As noted by Fanon (1963, 29), "the colonial world is a world divided into compartments", confining the colonized to "a world without spaciousness" (Fanon 1963, 30), while materially and discursively opening up the rest of the space for the colonizer. In this sense, this division into Indigenous and settler space, the reserve and the city, and propertylessness and private property has been the precondition for the production of cities as the embodiment of white settler space (Blomley 2004). Due to its allegedly new and modern nature, it was the city where settlers could most effectively project their fantasy of being the original inhabitants and rightful owners of the land. To this end, colonial descriptions of Indigenous peoples in relation to allegedly "empty" lands have drawn heavily on tropes of mobility and transience (Blomley and Pratt 2001, 158-9). The displacement of Indigenous peoples has been further legitimized through the construction of spatial and temporal difference, with reserves imagined "as existing in another time frame" (Peters 2001b, 69). Narratives that depict Indigeneity as the constitutive outside of the "civilized" space of the settler city were essential to the creation of cities as settler space and continue to regulate racialized bodies and spaces (Blomley 2004, 119; Barman 2007, 5; Razack 2002; Edmonds 2010).

In fact, settler representations of space cannot be de-linked from the production of material space and the geographies of white settler violence. For instance, the grid and the survey normalized and legitimized the settler notion of space as consisting of empty squares to be filled, i.e. land waiting to be "settled" and "developed". This mapping of space into parcels of fee simple title – as if Indigenous title never existed – articulated new relations between colonizer and colonized (Blomley 2003). Harris (2004, 178) notes

that "this new human geography – the survey lines, the property boundaries, the roads and railways, the farms, the industrial camps, the towns – became, from a native point of view, the most pervasive disciplinary technology of all. Superimposed on their former lands, it defined where they could and could not go." Work continues to go into "settler colonialism's ongoing project of reterritorialization" (Edmonds 2010, 246), with contemporary rationalities of government still seeking to bring into being a social reality in which Indigenous peoples – as peoples with inherent rights, title, and sovereignty – do not exist. This remains as the central objective of the settler state today (Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Veracini 2010). And this objective has been particularly relevant in relation to the city, because its very creation was predicated on the institutionalization of apartheid in the service of state formation, private property, and capitalist accumulation fuelled by the dispossession of Indigenous peoples (Gordon 2006, 2010).

The exclusionary ideologies and practices of private property continue to function as a powerful form of disciplinary power in cities today (Mitchell 2003). In the Australian context, Howitt (2006, 54) points out that "the legal imaginary of terra nullius established a political framework for thinking about the nature of property in the Australian landscape – the governance of resources, the development, settlement and planning of land use – as if Indigenous peoples' rights did not exist". This thinking, I argue, is particularly pronounced in urban contexts. Within this spatial logic of coloniality, the reproduction of cities as settler space requires their conceptualization and ongoing policing as terra nullius (Tomiak 2008).

The impacts of dispossession are evident insofar as many Indigenous people who live in urban areas, especially Indigenous women, are marginalized, with higher unemployment, lower income, poorer health status, poorer housing, higher rates of homelessness, lower levels of education, and greater dependence on government support (Siggner 2003). Contextualizing and historicizing the social disadvantages experienced by Indigenous peoples is crucial, because "a focus on contemporary social and economic marginalization hides the way the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples from their lands contributes to their contemporary conditions" (Peters 2001a, 138; see also Silver 2006).

Historically, the removal of Indigenous bodies from cities was a key objective of policies and state practices. More recently, the state goals of eliminating the Indigenous presence has focused more on entrenching a political and legal vacuum in order to keep out Indigenous rights and jurisdiction. Even when policies, such as the federal Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) purport to include Indigenous actors in decision-making and governance, state engagement is based on disconnecting individuals from Indigenous citizenship, as evident in the category "urban Aboriginal". In this way, nation-to-nation relationships, inherent rights, treaty obligations, and the Crown's fiduciary duty are re-framed as local community and economic development partnerships. There is continuity between older colonial paradigms and neoliberal versions of settler colonialism in that the point of these technologies of power remains the same, namely to insulate white settler space and the property regime upon which it is based by erasing Indigenous title, nationhood, and sovereignty. While settler state objectives of transfer remain in firmly in place (Veracini 2010), governmental tactics have shifted at all scales, including the urban. Most notably, neoliberal techniques of governing at a distance have precipitated the

proliferation of self-management arrangements (Rose 1999; Dean 2010), including those under the Urban Aboriginal Strategy.

The Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS)
The Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) is often seen as indicative of greater federal recognition and redistribution with respect to urban Indigenous peoples. However, the federal government's claims of more inclusive policies with respect to Indigenous citizens who live in urban areas and increased collaboration with "willing partners" should be seen critically in light of the intensification of the politics of displacement and disconnection.

The UAS was announced in 1998, under the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians (OFI), and remained a policy directive without dedicated funding until 2003, when eight Census Metropolitan Areas – Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, and Toronto – were selected as pilot cities. In 2004, the UAS was expanded to four additional cities: Prince Albert, Thompson, Prince George, and Lethbridge; these are smaller cities with a high proportion of Indigenous residents. Ottawa is the latest addition to the program in 2007.

Initially, $25 million were allocated for pilot projects in the eight designated cities. In 2004, an additional $25 million was made available for the now 12 cities included under the UAS. In 2007, the UAS received a 5-year renewal and funding of $69.5 million. In March 2012, the UAS was renewed for two years, with funding levels remaining the same. Federal funding provided through the UAS is insufficient to meet the demand for Indigenous-specific programming in cities. Rather, the funds are considered strategic incentives to a) create relationships among Aboriginal organizations and governments, and b) to leverage money from other levels of government. For the refocused 2007 UAS, federal funding is provided on a shared (50:50) basis with provincial and municipal funding.

The UAS was conceptualized as a mechanism to facilitate partnerships and enhanced coordination among federal, provincial, and municipal governments, and community organizations in order "to support projects that address local priorities" (Urban Aboriginal Strategy n.d.). These projects are supported through Multi-year Comprehensive Funding Arrangements (MCFA) or Comprehensive Funding Arrangements (CFA). Each UAS community creates a Community Committee, mandated to "partner with the private sector and all levels of government to accelerate planning, funding decisions and responses to urban Aboriginal issues. Each Community Committee is composed of a cross section of the Aboriginal community to ensure decisions reflect broad community concerns and priorities" (Urban Aboriginal Strategy n.d.). The Shared Delivery Model entails the establishment of a common table which makes funding recommendations based on a Request for Proposals (RFP) process (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada n.d.). It is important to note that decision-making power, ultimately, rests with the federal government.

The so-called enhanced UAS in 2007 entailed the identification of three project priority areas: improving life skills; promoting job training, skills and entrepreneurship; and supporting Aboriginal women, children and families (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada,

n.d.). The stated aim of the enhanced UAS is "promote the self-reliance of — and increase life choices for — Aboriginal people in urban centres" (Urban Aboriginal Strategy n.d.). Projects are funded based on whether they are consistent with objectives to "enhance existing relationships", "build new partnerships", and "strategically focus investments to enable urban Aboriginal communities to be more self-reliant within strong and vibrant cities across Canada" (Urban Aboriginal Strategy, Program overview n.d.).

Centered on a discourse of economic security and enhancing local economies (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2007a, 2007b), the UAS reflects neoliberal state goals of individual marketization. When then-Minister Prentice announced the refocused UAS, he made this clear by stating that the strategy "emphasizes programs and initiatives that enable Aboriginal people to train for and gain employment – which is key to the attainment of personal aspirations and economic goals" (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2007a). The UAS thus privileges "personal aspirations and economic goals" while making it difficult for collective aspirations to be articulated by virtue of the divisive framework for decision-making and funding allocations. The strategic direction of the UAS is thus indicative of neoliberal agendas of responsibilization, marketization, and urban competitiveness (see also Walker 2005).

Political Containment, Collaboration, and Resistance
Indigenous peoples have employed a range of strategies to contest their displacement in and through the settler city, including litigation to challenge the legal geography of the Indian Act (Corbiere 1999) and the administration of programming (Misquadis/ Ardoch Algonquin Nation 2002/ 2003). While Indigenous resistance entails a wide range of practices, discourses, initiatives, movements, organizations, and institutions, most significant perhaps is the fact that Indigenous peoples have continued to live in or moved, and in some instances returned, to cities (Lawrence 2004; Harris 2002). Indeed, Indigenous peoples have always transgressed the boundaries imposed by the state and "engaged in a virtually constant micropolitics of resistance" (Harris 2004, 179-180). This politics of resistance contests the racialized entitlement to urban space (Shaw 2007, 175), and thereby the very foundation of the settler city (Tomiak 2011).

In the remainder of this section, I will discuss processes of collaboration and resistance as they relate to the UAS. The interview data collected in Ottawa and Winnipeg suggest a range of perspectives and positionings in relation to the "partnering state" and local assemblages of urban Indigenous governance. Interview participants expressed both scepticism and optimism with regard to how new and emerging arrangements would support the mandates of Indigenous service agencies and political organizations. Representatives of Indigenous political organizations and governments tended to be highly critical of the UAS, while representatives of service providers framed it as a step in the right direction. However, given the lack of resources attached to the federal initiative and the lack of political space for Indigenous actors, the UAS was generally seen as falling short. There was agreement that more investment was required to overcome the neglect of the past and to develop policies that better reflect the complexities of urban Indigenous realities, including extra-local contexts.

Following Larner and Butler (2005, 86), neoliberal state-community partnerships are considered inherently contradictory, contingent, context-specific, and two-way processes. Based on my argument that the primary strategic direction of the UAS is the responsibilization of the Aboriginal voluntary sector and the simultaneous imposition of constraints through contractual relationships, as a technique of governing at a distance, the UAS is seen primarily as a form of political containment.[2] Since the focus on services, individual needs, and a pan-Aboriginal voluntary sector is integral to its rationale, the UAS undermines rights-based approaches by seeking to normalize an understanding of urban Indigenous politics as disconnected from Indigenous nations, territories, and rights. The UAS thus reinforces state control by determining the nature of community as well as the terms and conditions of collaboration. However, by shutting out rights-based agendas and existing Métis and First Nation structures of governance, the UAS has been in a permanent crisis of legitimacy vis-à-vis its claims to foster inclusive decision-making in the two research sites.

At the same time, the downloading of programming responsibilities has presented important openings for Indigenous community-based organizations and collective action at multiple scales. As noted by one interviewee, "there is more collaboration, even though it's so far it's only very specific issues that are big enough issues that you forget your political lines or whatever. So it is starting and I would say over the next ten years or so, I think the whole political Aboriginal climate is going to be different, because I think we're going to do a lot more collaboration. And it's happening at the service level more" (female, representative of Aboriginal service provider, Winnipeg, May 29, 2008). Participation in the UAS – and access to capacity building funds – has provided opportunities for Indigenous community-building. However, while Indigenous agencies are delivering an increasing range of programs and services, they are severely constrained in their ability to respond to the needs and political aspirations of local communities by state parameters around funding, jurisdiction, and representation. Funding levels are inadequate and project-based, with priorities set primarily by funders, as illustrated by an interviewee in Ottawa who explained that "you're not going to get that need filled until the government decides there's a need there and the funding comes along. So we chase the funding and we modify whatever needs we have to see if they can fit into whatever criteria that funding has identified. So we chase the money basically" (female, representative of local Aboriginal service provider, Ottawa, September 5, 2008).

Yet many of the interviewees working for service agencies pointed out that these partnerships have been catalysts for change in the sense that local Indigenous communities are now seen as legitimate participants in planning, policy development, and implementation. The fact that urban Indigenous populations are no longer invisible and

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[2] The impacts of neoliberal policies and practices on Indigenous voluntary organizations are not unique; they pertain to the third sector, more generally. In her work on shadow state formation, Wolch (1990, 206-7) describes the negative effects of increased competition for resources, contractual relationships and monitoring, and increased state surveillance and control on advocacy, participation, and the autonomy of voluntary organizations to pursue self-determined agendas. In light of processes that seem to stifle activism and to limit the political imagination of what is possible, especially through the pressure to deliver services rather than advocate for systemic change, these processes have led some scholars and practitioners to be sceptical of the transformative potential of the voluntary sector (INCITE! 2007).

the greater capacity to deliver culturally appropriate services were seen as constituting a significant shift in the political landscape.

Among the most contentious pieces of the UAS, as noted by interview participants, was who was invited to be "at the table" in the first place, as well as the larger question regarding whose interests are being advanced through these partnerships. In fact, Indigenous governments and political organizations have been very critical of the UAS, noting the continued marginalization of rights-based agendas (Parliament of Canada 2011). The tensions between status-blind, needs-based and rights-based, membership-driven approaches to self-governance appear to come to a head in cities. The UAS has created a framework that reinforces the perception that community-based and nation-based logics and claims are incompatible. The ongoing exclusion of Indigenous rights is consistent with my overarching argument that state practices continue to erase Indigenous peoples and nations, because re-scaling and re-territorialization as a result of Indigenous nation-building are seen as a direct threat to the settler city.

Rather than looking to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit governments for their well-being, urban Indigenous citizens are asked to turn to voluntary organizations and multi-scalar state- community partnerships, where collective action is subject to the discipline of state control and surveillance. A community worker in Winnipeg clarified that "there's a lot of tension over who represents who in the city... I mean because I'm a service provider, so as much as possible I stay out of the political end of it, because if you get involved in the political end, then your organization is going to feel the flak out there. So you're better off to stay out of the politics, because you can't mix the two" (female, representative of Aboriginal service provider, Winnipeg, May 29, 2008). This perception stems from the state pitting Indigenous governments, political organizations, and community-based service providers against each other in the competition for the same pool of resources. As noted by the interviewee above, this has a depoliticizing effect.

All of the community workers interviewed for this study expressed frustration with the shortcomings of the UAS and the way in which decision-making was constrained through various technologies of government at a distance. Despite these structural barriers, Indigenous actors have appropriated the political space that has opened up through the UAS through coalition-building or by using partnership mechanisms to press for rights-based agendas. Interviewees made it very clear that their participation in partnerships is based on political imaginaries that are different from those expressed by state actors. Indigenous actors have used the additional resources that have become available to build capacity in order to pursue collectivist agendas, even if there appears to be room for improvement with respect to meaningful community participation.

The UAS thus contains enabling elements, but also limits political choices and possibilities. What appears to be at stake is how urban Indigenous communities are conceptualized – and by whom. The fundamental problem remains in that UAS is a vehicle through which federal responsibilities, including its fiduciary duty, are downloaded. As such, it is a mechanism through which nation-to-nation relationships are reframed as community development partnerships. Indigenous organizations and communities have been able to significantly influence outcomes under the UAS, but they

had no input in setting the parameters of state engagement which have placed narrow limits on the types of governance models and initiatives that can be pursued. In this sense, the politics of partnership is a form of political containment where discursive frames and projects have to be aligned to fit the needs-based model under the UAS – and work against more profound transformations of urban Indigenous governance and rights-based agendas of decolonization.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated that while the neoliberal order is no less steeped in colonialism, it articulates its program of erasure differently. Here, coloniality is reproduced through the purported inclusion of Indigenous peoples in institutions of governance and the freedom to participate in the economy. Thus, the normativity of neoliberal Canadian citizenship and Crown sovereignty is reinscribed through processes of partnership, incorporation, and collaboration. In this way, neoliberal settler state governmentality has fused colonial domination, racialization, and liberal freedoms into a form of self-regulation and market individualism that operates through economic rights and choice. An important element of neoliberal state governmentality is the "neutralization" of racialized and colonial categories through discourses of inclusion. Yet, these categories continue to structure relationships, but are often more difficult to detect, as they are framed within the language of opportunity and participation (Goldberg 2009).

As the previous section illustrates, the settler state project of displacement is unfinished and always on the defensive against Indigenous resistance. First Nation, Métis and Inuit struggles for self-determination have appropriated neoliberal modes of governance for purposes of community-building and agendas of self-determination. In my analysis of Indigenous resistance to the politics of displacement in urban areas, I have stressed the contradictory nature of partnerships under the UAS. The rescaling of urban Aboriginal governance in the 2000s is determined by neoliberal-colonial logics and Indigenous struggles – struggles which are centrally about the nature of jurisdictional boundaries, place, and citizenship.

Writing against narrow interpretations of Indigenous-state relationships based on colonial mappings, I have argued that a crucial step in resisting the spatial logic of coloniality lies in politicizing the historical and ongoing Indigenous presence in cities, not in isolation from, but as integral parts of Indigenous nations. Substantiating Indigenous rights requires a system-wide policy approach that transcends the Indian Act topography of rights and entitlements, because, as John Borrows (2008, 26) notes in relation to First Nation realities, "anything less than this system wide approach contributes to assimilation because it fosters the disappearance of our people when they leave the reserves".

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