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BOOK REVIEW

Owen Toews

Stolen City: Racial Capitalism and the Making of Winnipeg.

Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2018.

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Even those who would deny Indigenous claims to traditional territories know these claims exist on the settler colonial political landscape. That these territories include urban spaces, and these spaces contain ongoing attempts to express Indigenous identities, remains challenging to non-Indigenous understandings of indigeneity. Urban Indigenous identities can also be challenging to Indigenous communities. The topic has not been ignored by Canadian scholars, indeed it has been well served through several collections (Anderson 2013, Peters and Anderson 2013) that describe Indigenous urbanization and document how Indigenous groups negotiate what remains was a fraught landscape (semantic arguments will not protect Canada's reputation). These earlier works are now augmented by this excellent examination of racial capitalism in Winnipeg and the city's particular expressions of Indigenous resistance. Essentially, what Toews demonstrates is, counter to Marx's assumptions of capitalism's homogenizing and demystifying effects on social relations, ongoing political economic strategies to exaggerate and discriminate regional and subcultural differences in the service of capital.

Toews bookends his argument with the development of the Youth for Christ facilities in downtown Winnipeg, corner of Main and Higgins. News of this latest "capitalist case for an updated Indian Residential School" saw the mobilization of "highly productive anger" in community movements framed around Indigenous resistance. The opposition lines were relatively clear; as one CEO said, the new charitable structure that was to be built over local claims to space was necessary because "stabilizing the area and providing a framework for further private and public investment is a paramount importance." While resistance to this political economy includes labour and social movements, what is clear is that this particular expression of capitalism began with, and continues to exert its most violent efforts on, the alienation of Indigenous communities from their lands and the rights to speak to the use of these lands and their resources. The urban Indigenous interface presents ongoing, intergenerational, resistance to racist capital expansion.

Toews draws on academic and media sources to show the urban landscape as perhaps the ideal colonial backdrop for the demonization of Indigenous people. Time and time again, prairie settler colonial planning focus on managing the supposed risks of Indigenous people. As Gunder and Hillier (2009) teased out a dense but useful critique of planning from a Lacanian perspective, 'planning' is an empty signifier, one of many that act to sooth urban dwellers that someone, somewhere, has their best interests at heart and is engineering an ever better urban life. For many white people, that amounts to exclusion and removal of 'itinerants' and other undesirables. Geographer David Harvey argues Marxist critiques are better applied to contemporary neoliberalism than the 18th Century liberalism that it originally arose to contest. Toews unpacks the ephemeral modern liberal support for Indigenous owners played out in urban landscapes as surely as it was on prairie lands 150 years ago, and how Indigenous citizens continue

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to be identified as undesirable, culturally and economically. How easy, in one of Winnipeg's air-conditioned malls with their potted palms and trickling fountains, to forget all was once governed by very different social systems, and that ecosystems (a term increasingly used to describe the networks of techno-science innovation) have been irreparably damaged. Winnipeg's crossroad at the centre of 'Stolen City' where the YfC complex is juxtaposed with the Indigenous-led Thunderchild House on the opposite corner is just one of many choices where ruling elites of Winnipeg continue to extract wealth at the expense of Indigenous rights. What Toews describes so well is the corralling of alternatives that would empower urban Indigenous communities into ever smaller bureaucratic space (bandwidth is barely a metaphor for attention spans in modern governance) until they are literally deleted from Winnipeg's planning and ultimately from supply chains for food, care, education and wellbeing.

While New Zealand was the poster-child for neoliberalism in the 1990s (Chile without the guns was the joke), the IMF and Chicago School of Economics might equally have nominated Canada. Toews describes the machinations of 'tax increment financing' (TIF) that enabled the bloodless extraction of public wealth in the service of city planning. Even criticism of TIF accepts it was initiated to fix "undesirable, underdeveloped or otherwise blighted neighbourhoods" (Kives 2018). If urban planning utilizes the language and processes of emotional investment (Sandercock 2004), this important book reminds us that the dominant political economic investors want a return on capital and are more than comfortable ignoring Indigenous rights in the process.

The book is liberally illustrated with historical photographs, maps and Winnipeg scenes mentioned in the text that provide a parallel photovoice of the city. I had not visited Winnipeg until the very end of the time for this review, spending a single night there for the annual Canadian Risk and Hazards Network meeting. In two spare hours that evening I found a small craft brewery (online), and (Google) mapped a route that could not avoid an underpass system I will label the underpass labyrinthine only because on the return journey I had to ask directions to escape. It was a frustrating and somewhat eerie experience, detracting from the excellent saison and balmy evening, though with this book fresh in my mind I was perhaps a little jaundiced. Modern cities struggle with the weight of people, logistics, expectations and aspirations. That Indigenous communities have a legitimate and creative claim to Canadian cities has yet to get the traction needed to truly create ethical and functioning urban space. A local newspaper in my hotel (a rare analogue engagement for many if not most citizens) had reactions to a report on city planning that had just been released. The article was headed "Broken culture... Significant anger" at delays in yet more change. The business page, above the fold, ran the headline "Capital projects hit funding snag" which makes "Stolen City" both prescient and not the last chapter on Winnipeg's story. Anyone wanting to understand how these headlines come about needs to read this book.

Anderson, A., Ed. (2013). *Home in the City: Urban Aboriginal Housing and Living Conditions*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

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Kives, B. (2018). Winnipeg begins to wonder if it TIFs too much. Toronto, CBC News.

Peters, E. and C. Anderson, Eds. (2013). *Indigenous in the city: contemporary identities and cultural innovation*. Vancouver, UBC Press.

Sandercock, L. (2004). "Towards a planning imagination for the 21st Century." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 70(2): 133-141.

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