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SUBURBIA, SETTLER COLONIALISM AND THE WORLD TURNED INSIDE OUT

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Abstract: While its primary aim is to explore possibilities for new research, this article contends that suburban and settler colonial imaginaries are related. It suggests that an awareness of the settler colonial “situation” and its dynamics can help an original approach to the interpretation of suburban forms (and vice versa). References to the suburban “frontier” have been frequent in both public discourse and scholarly debate, and suburban phenomena characterise in one way or another all settler societies. This connection, however, has not been the subject of sustained investigation. Thus, this article focuses on shared traditions of anti-urban perception and on a determination to pre-emptively secede from the metropole/metropolis in the presence of growing tensions and contradictions. Similarly, while settler colonial projects constitute separate political entities via an “outward” movement towards various “frontiers of settlement”, independent suburbs are also established via an “outward” movement and in an attempt to maintain local control over local affairs. In both instances displacement is a response/the only response to crisis.

Introduction

This article is premised on extensive theoretical engagement with settler colonialism, a circumstance here defined (after Patrick Wolfe, 1999: 2) as a particular type of colonialism where colonisers “come to stay” (on settler colonialism, see also Denoon 1983, Stasiulis, Yuval-Davis 1995, Russell 2001, Elkins, Pedersen 2005, Goldstein, Lubin 2008, Belich 2009, Banivanua-Mar, Edmonds 2010, Ford 2010, Veracini 2010, Veracini 2011, Bateman, Pilkington 2011). Some of the findings of my research on the political traditions of settler colonialism include the notion that settler colonial displacement is a response to growing contradictions and crisis (here defined as the unprecedented and never-ceasing upheaval that accompanied the onset of “modernity”, see Griffin 2007), that settler migration is fundamentally characterised by the assertion of a specific sovereign capacity (sovereignty is here defined flexibly as collective self-rule and the ability to exercise control over a specific locale), that settlers routinely imagine their movement through space as a “return”, that settler colonial projects are premised on an anxious pattern of perception, and that settler projects are routinely conceived as an alternative to revolution (Veracini forthcoming).

At the same time, this paper is based on an analysis of suburban formations that also foregrounds ongoing crisis and a spectrum of sovereign capacities. The constituent features of the suburban “ideal” include the single-family house, the nuclear family, the separation between work and home, and the separation between gendered spaces. In *Crabgrass Frontier* Kenneth Jackson lists the following defining characteristics: “a single family living in a single dwelling”, and “function (non-farm residential), class (middle and upper status), separation (a daily journey-to-work), and density (low relative to older sections)” (Jackson 1985: 7, 11; on the long lasting development of suburban forms, see also, in the context of an extensive literature, Fishman 1987, Machor 1987, Kelly 1989, Stanback 1991, Palen 1995, Thomas 1998, McClung 2000, Baxandall, Ewen 2000, Hayden 2003). The suburban landscape is also a middle-class landscape (that is, a classless landscape), and an ethnically homogeneous space where contradictions must remain unseen (see Baumgartner 1988). Most importantly, the suburbs have seceded from the city and established smaller satellite governments, providing greater control to their residents, together with a significant degree of self-determination. Thus, as suburbia is premised on separation from the city – a site of incessant crisis/“transition”, as first identified by the Chicago School – and on the invisibility of unacceptable “Others”, *displacement* and *distanciation* fundamentally shape suburban phenomena (“distanciation” is a psychoanalytical term also used in cinema studies that here refers to processes that produce emotional estrangement and alienation).

However, while David Harvey (2000) has noted that exclusion is routinely at the very core of utopias, the settler “revolution” (see Belich 2009) is also crucially premised on a fundamental displacement that produces separation (and distanciation) from what is construed as a stifling, corrupting and chaotic ‘Old World’. A determination to secede from the metropolis/metropole is thus a shared feature of these two phenomena.¹ Christopher Hill (1972) talked about English society on the eve of civil war and revolution as a “world turned upside down”. I describe the political imagination of settler colonialism as “world-turned-inside-out” traditions (Veracini forthcoming). These traditions opt out of both revolution and reaction; they change the world by changing worlds. This article explores the hypothesis that settler colonialism and suburbia are sovereign responses to crisis, instances the world-turned-inside-out.

In relating settler colonialism and suburbia and highlighting a shared type of social organisation and a concern with stability and control, this article follows a morphological method. Its ordering is neither chronological nor spatial, it does not aim to establish a direct lineage between colonial and settler colonial forms and does not focus on a particular period or a specific region. Rather, it focuses on forms and formations, and on displacement and distanciation (respectively, the first and second parts of this article). The aim is to emphasise morphological contiguity. However, as it interprets both suburbia and settler colonial phenomena as premised on an anxious escape that comprehensively rejects environments that are perceived as increasingly threatening, this article also contends that suburbia *re-enacts* settlement (on settler re-enactments see Agnew, Lamb 2009).

And yet, even if this article is not dedicated to establishing an historical link between the two forms, that the two roughly *succeed* each other should be emphasised (this is actually complex, and the two phenomena are in fact coeval: there were clearly detectable suburban forms already during the golden era of “settlerism” [for an analysis of nineteenth century suburban development see Jackson 1985; on “settlerism” see Belich 2009] and only a handful of settler colonial regimes have been discontinued).² Generally speaking, in the US, a westward movement, which was in fact a multitude of distinct movements, is followed by a multitude of outward movements. Frederick Turner had announced that as the “frontier” would close, migration would cease and Americans would settle down. However, after a nadir, which seemed to fulfil his prophecy, migration rates grew again. This time, though, the migration pattern of white Americans was directed to the suburbs, not to Midwestern farms (see Hall, Ruggles 2004). Historian of American suburbia Dolores Hayden’s periodisation of American history envisages a succession of the nineteenth century ascendancy of a “rural myth”, comprising images of self-reliant Jeffersonian farmers, followed by the “urban myth” of the early twentieth century, constructed around images of an efficient melting pot, prosperity and urbanised high culture, followed by the cities’ fall. By 1990, she concludes, suburbia had an undisputable upper hand (Hayden 2003). In this paper I suggest that the first and third passages in this sequence can be seen as world-turned-inside-out moments.

As well as generally succeeding each other, and considering that this progression involves highly compatible formations that target very different locales, settler colonisation and suburbia are also linked by the personal experiences of the migrants themselves. Robert Fogelson, for example, links the growth of Los Angeles (a crucial laboratory of suburban practices) with the dreams of Midwestern Anglos. They “came to Los Angeles”, he notes,

with a conception of the good community which was embodied in single-family houses, located on large lots, surrounded by landscaped lawns, and isolated from business activities. Not for them multifamily dwellings, confined to narrow plots, separated by cluttered streets, and interspersed with commerce and industry. Their vision was epitomized by the residential suburb – spacious, affluent, clean, decent, permanent, predictable, and homogeneous – and violated by the great city – congested, impoverished, filthy, immoral, transient, uncertain and heterogeneous (Fogelson 1967: 144-145).

Both its Midwestern filiation and the defining features he identifies suggest that in many ways suburbia was re-enacting settlement (in turn, the settlement of the Midwest had re-enacted the settlement of New England, which was an attempt to re-enact an idealised vision of a long lost “merry England”).

Indeed, succession and morphological contiguity indicate that suburbia re-enacts settlement in more ways than mimicking housing styles (i.e., “colonials” and “Ranches”). In both instances, for example, the space surrounding the home is seen as essential to reproduction (allowing subsistence farming in the case of

the homestead, or the healthy nurture of children in the case of the suburban home). Even a predilection of the cul de sac can be seen as contributing to re-enactment: if the daily commute replicates settler displacement, the home must be located at the end of the road. Moreover, if the automobile made suburbia possible, the car itself constituted a re-enactment of settler migrations: it was to contain a cohesive family unit and should have had a man at the wheel. Most importantly, as a growing body of scholarly literature has emphasised, automobility also enabled a response to crisis (see, for example, Ling 1990, McShane 1994, Gartman 1994, Seiler 2008).

Re-enacting, however, is about *acting* again and about *enacting* again and in the context of this analysis should be seen as pertaining to both performance and enforcement/compliance. These were social projects that developed in the context of and as a response to revolutionary transformations (like “crisis” and “sovereignty”, “revolution” and “revolutionary” are here understood in a very flexible way and refer to all processes that fundamentally reorganise relationships of production). These projects aimed to pre-empt the possibility of revolutionary change by turning the world inside out rather than upside down.

One final introductory note: suburbia is a quintessentially American phenomenon. And yet, both settler colonialism and suburban phenomena are not exclusive to the US and there are recognisably suburban locales in all settler societies (see Beauregard 2006: 65).³ In an aside comment, Jackson noted that only “New Zealand, Australia and Canada, all with strong frontier traditions, small populations, and a British-induced cultural dislike of cities, share the American [suburban] experience” (1985: 7). My wider research on settler colonialism is conceived, among other things, as an antidote against notions of American exceptionalism. While other settler societies share with the US the suburban experience, a fact that the literature on suburbia has largely failed to acknowledge, the US is one of a number of settler societies, a fact that American studies as a scholarly enterprise has also generally failed to recognise (for exceptions to this interpretative pattern, see Greene [2007], Hoxie [2008]). Linking settler colonial and suburban forms inevitably undermines assertions of US exceptionalism.

1. Displacement

Settler colonial and suburban re-enactments – the reproduction of lost worlds wiped out by crisis – are premised on an original displacement. Both settlers and suburbanites escape locations that they perceive as no longer being what they “used to be”. As displacement fundamentally informs these formations’ morphology, both suburbia and settler colonial phenomena are therefore premised on nonpropinquity (Patrick Ashton refers to suburbs as “community without propinquity” [1984: 68]). Settlers trek out to a separate location; suburbanites establish communities beyond the margins of the urban region and their homes beyond a prescribed distance from the street and from one another. In both instances, and this is critical, the crisis is not addressed in place, and

displacement is the proposed solution – indeed, the only available option. Thus, settler colonial and suburban forms share a conception of freedom as the ability to move away. Henry Ford encapsulated this approach when he famously proclaimed in 1922: “we shall solve the city problem by leaving the city” (quoted in Gottlieb 2001: 294).

Displacement, of course, needs a particular conception of space, and it is significant that both forms operate in accordance with similar ways of constructing space. Most crucial in the context of their spatial strategies is the fact that the areas they invest are routinely represented as wastelands that are fundamentally vacant of any meaningful original presence. They are *tabula rasa* (on settler colonial constructions of space, see Banivanua-Mar, Edmonds 2010). One consequence of reiterated displacement is also that both phenomena are premised on *seriality* and consume space at a fierce rate: open vistas, bigger lots, enforced setbacks, reduced densities, even houses acquire a horizontal spread (for a compelling analysis of rural settler seriality as a counterpoint to urban organisation in early America, an analysis that could be easily adapted to the study of suburban seriality, see White 2005). Kevin Starr notes how “long before the automobile, the citizen of the [Los Angeles] region had embraced horizontality as an ideal” (1997: 159). But horizontality had been embraced much earlier, even if not in an urban setting, and horizontality fundamentally constitutes the spatio-political imagination of settler colonialism as well (on the contrary, alternative political imaginaries – i.e., colonial, revolutionary and reactionary imaginaries – think of stratification and display a vertical imagination). Spatial separation is premised on and produces a horizontal imagination (see Linklater 2003).

But it is not only about a foundational displacement and the recurring disavowal of original presences; a horizontal imagination inevitably challenges hierarchical understandings. Both settler colonialism and suburbia are premised on an act of re-centering that reverses the relationship between centre and periphery. Before each form asserted its ascendancy, there was a situation in which the closer one was from the centre the higher the status; conversely, power and prestige diminished as one approached the periphery. As this was the case both with regards to the colonial situation and in relation to the walking city, suburbanisation challenged urban hierarchies in a way that is similar to what James Belich defines in *Replenishing the Earth* as the “settler transition”. “Settlerism”, he notes, was based on the unprecedented notion that migrating to a settler frontier far away was actually better than remaining in corrupting circumstances (2009: 145-176). This transition is detected by Jackson as well: “suburban” as a term, initially, “had strong pejorative connotations”, he notes, but by “the 1870s the word *suburb* no longer implied inferiority or derision” (1985: 16, 71).⁴ If the daily short-distance transfer of commuters re-enacts the permanent long-distance displacement of settlers, both displacements are enabled by transport revolutions and both mark the distance between locales characterised by unresolved contradictions (i.e., “the city”, the “Old World”) and newly imagined sites of putative virtuous social organisation. But this is the point: if suburbia turns the traditional city “inside out”, and Jackson defines the move to the suburb as

“an exodus that would turn cities ‘inside out’”, the settler revolution also turns colonial centralising hierarchies “inside out” (1985: 20). Of course, not all suburbs are able to credibly sustain their primacy vis-à-vis their urban centres and the settler colonies, despite claims regarding their regenerative capacities, often retain stubborn doubts about their ultimate ability to deliver. For the purpose of instituting a particular imaginary, however, the very *possibility* of reversing centralising relationships of power is more important than their actual reversal.

Both forms are premised on pervasive anti-urban sensitivities where spatial separation is mirrored by conceptual distinction. Settler rural and suburban residential patterns are obviously different, and yet they are both thought as fundamentally antithetical to the city – they both understand the city as a place of tension and intolerable contradictions, a place from where it is imperative to escape. This sensitivity, which is typically suburban, has an ancient lineage, and anti-urbanism has always been a feature of settler colonial imaginings. Jefferson, for example, perceived cities as a necessary evil at best, and his vision for America was replete with agrarian virtues underpinned by a majority of isolated farmers. He defined them as “pestilential to the morals, the health, and the liberties of man” (quoted in Jackson 1985: 68). More generally, as well as premised on negative representations of urban settings, both forms are also premised on an Old World vs. New World dichotomy. While Tocqueville could focus on settler communities as the epitome of the American “New World”, suburbia is also a constituent part of this sustained opposition. As Robert Beauregard shows (2006; see also below), the post-WWII suburban transformation allowed America to distinguish itself in a renewed way from the Old World. In this way a settler determined social body was thus reasserting/sustaining an Old/New World dialectic. At the same time, that idealised representations of both suburbia and the settler colonies constitute a synthesis between two equally negative dialectical counterpoints should also be emphasised. On the one hand, there are settler representations of a civilised life that is safely distant from both corrupting urban settings and degrading rural isolation. On the other, there is the suburb, where urban comforts and rural amenities combine in a golden mean. Similarly, the country and the city are also synthesised with reference to the small town, and the Garden City is also a synthesis; small town and suburban America are discursively related.⁵

Traditions of idealised representation mirror in both cases corresponding traditions of anxious condemnation, and representations of suburbia, for example, recurrently oscillate between envisaging regenerating virtuous lifestyles and ‘horrid’ monotony, desperation, and isolation. The point here is not whether critiques or apologies of suburban America are truer, but to emphasise that a world-turned-inside-out imaginary inevitably expresses contrasting and simultaneous images entailing regenerative lifestyles and corrupting circumstances (however, in the context of a generally critical scholarly literature, for counterpoints, see, for example, D. J. Waldie’s poetic apology [2005] and Schneider 1992). The former ones will emphasise success, the latter ones failure. This is also the case with regards to settler projects, where images portraying “manly” frontier pioneers, “horrid colonials”, and “unshaven

barbarians” are inevitably linked, and representations of rural virtues and prosperous yeomen regenerating in bracing climates are always paralleled by descriptions of decultured, numbing isolation (see, for example, Fairburn 1989). As they coconstitute each other, the two patterns of representation remain dialectically linked. And yet, one tradition and its counterpoint remain at a distance. Settler and suburban displacements institute a dialectical opposition but cannot ultimately resolve it.

Displacement also produces a localised sovereign capacity. Indeed, it is displacement that allows a sovereign assertion without the need for a revolutionary break. Settlers and suburbanites are *founders* of political orders and are especially focused on exercising local control over local affairs, and if settlers can decide not to secede if they are not compelled to (but will opt to do so if Parliament interferes), suburbia, as Robert Reich notes, is especially about the “secession of the successful” (quoted in McKenzie 1994: 186; see also Boudreau, Keil 2001). Thus, suburbs, like the settler colonies, establish immediately sovereign political entities (as mentioned in the introduction, “sovereign” here refers to the capacity to control a specific locale), where as settlers operate at a distance from a European sovereign who cannot control their actions, suburbanisation is made possible by a legislative framework that allows suburbs to effectively resist annexation (it is arguable that incorporation and self rule as legislated by state legislatures was made possible by a specifically settler-informed political culture). Normally, expanding cities annexed their hinterlands but their “imperialism” was eventually reversed. It was as if the right to declare independence had been granted to the rich that had seceded from the cities and could afford service provision (previously, marginal areas had not been able to compete with cities in the provision of services and had generally acquiesced to annexation). That the suburban “revolution” replicated the dynamics of the settler “revolution” described by Belich (2009) should be emphasised. Wealthy and independent suburbs thereafter regularly and successfully rebuffed expanding cities. Thus, racial and class distinctions, new laws that made incorporations easy and annexations unworkable, and improved services (together with the promise of exercising moral control and assuage particular anxieties) underpin and explain political fragmentation. Most importantly, resistance to annexation was premised on the notion that conflict was ultimately unsolvable (in the cities); suburbanites, like the settlers who had decided to “remove” to distant locations in the nineteenth century, were choosing not to fight in place and were rebuilding autonomous political orders elsewhere.

A general pattern of displacement applies to gender roles as well. If the crisis produces confusion, the suburban and settler moves reassert patriarchal orders, and this reassertion is premised, among other things, on the re-constitution of distinct separate gendered spheres. The homesteader and the homeowner are male; they *represent* their family. They don’t merely own: they reproduce in the house and the house is surrounded by a lot – the symbolic representation at once of their independence and of their capacity to isolate their women. Jackson aptly quotes Walt Whitman on this point: a man “is not a whole and complete man, unless he owns a house and the ground it stands on” (1985:

50). Ultimately, suburban forms, like settler colonial ones are inherently gendered (on gendered orders and the “American Dream”, see, for example, Hayden 2002, which describes how the “architecture of gender” shapes the suburbs, Appleton 1984, Appleton 1985). Hayden identifies “female domesticity” as a specific ideological construct and outlines its intimate relationship with suburban forms:

The ideology of female domesticity, developed in the United States during the same era when suburban borderlands were first attracting settlers, elevated the religious significance of woman’s work, defined as bearing and rearing children in the strong moral atmosphere of a Protestant home set in a natural landscape. The single-family house was invested with churchlike symbols as a sacred space where women’s work would win a reward in heaven. Catholic and Jewish immigrants also tied domesticity to religion (2003: 6).

But settler colonialism and domesticity, as Hayden indeed suggests, are also tied. This ideology was “popular since the 1840s”, she notes, and yet, if settler colonial formations are also considered, this ideology was actually much older (on the development of separate gendered spheres in Victorian Britain [and the colonies], see Davidoff, Hall 1987). Hayden recovers a painful history of gendered exclusion, a history that the social historians of the American West have also reconstructed: both suburbanite and pioneer women resented their isolation and developed a variety of strategies to cope with their segregation (on suburban gendered orders, see, also May 1989a, May 1989b). If the isolation of the nuclear family is a characteristic that is shared by homestead and suburban lot, it is because in the cities the nuclear family was perceived as especially challenged. In the cities, Jackson insightfully notes, “population was arrayed around production rather than biological units” (1985: 47). The suburbs re-enacted the separation between male and female worlds that industrialisation processes had been undermining, a separation that the settler homestead had similarly also reinforced.

But if settlers and suburbanites are “escapees”, even though they escape different things at different times (corrupting “Old Worlds” on the one hand, racial mixing, violence, crime, congestion, gender confusion, and filth on the other), they are also “returnees”: they undertake a movement in space that is meant to bring about a movement in time, a return to a social order that is perceived as compromised. Thus, return is yet another displacement.⁶ The expansion of homeownership that accompanied suburbanisation was meant to reproduce small-town America. It was a shift recurrently imagined as a return: to “family life, domesticity, safety, and the innocence of childhood” (Beauregard 2006: 124). Eric Avila perceptively notes how the “white flight” of the American mid-twentieth century aimed at a return to an order that had been undermined. Ultra-modern forms were designed to reproduce specific gender and racial roles and reinstitute their separate locations:

The postwar suburban boom created a space, literally and figuratively, for reinstating racial and sexual barriers that weakened within an ascendant urban liberalism that reached its zenith during the 1930s and 1940s. As the racially exclusive patterns of postwar suburbanization facilitated the “blackening” of American inner cities, white flight reflected and reinforced the racial resegregation of the United States. And whereas the modern city incorporated women into public life – as workers and consumers – postwar suburbanization placed greater demands on women to return to the private sphere to resume their traditional responsibilities as mothers and wives. Creating a space for a return to normalcy, the postwar suburban boom offered a setting in which to restore traditional divisions between the races and the sexes (2004: 4).

At the same time, Avila also focuses on the tensions that had prompted the “white flight” in the first place:

The urban crisis initiated during the war years was as much social as it was economic. World War II unleashed a wave of racial violence in the nation’s cities, demonstrating the level of discomfort that accompanied the sudden diversification of urban society. The great migration of African Americans from the rural South to wartime centers of employment in the Northeast, Midwest, and Far West “blackened” the face of American cities considerably and aroused hostility from local whites, whose sense of entitlement to defense jobs rested on an entrenched conviction of white supremacy. On June 6, 1944, for example, ten thousand white workers at Cincinnati’s Wright aircraft engine plant staged a wildcat strike to protest the integration of the machine shop. Race riots exploded in cities elsewhere. The year 1943 delivered a moment of intense racial violence for the nation’s cities, as race riots erupted in New York City, Detroit, and Los Angeles, where the infamous Zoot Suit Riots between white sailors and Chicano youth demonstrated the extent to which other racial groups besides African Americans were implicated within wartime racial tensions (2004: 5-6).

Suburbia, on the contrary, was removed from tension. Finally, Avila focuses on the imaginative dimensions of this “flight”, where an imaginative displacement paralleled a real one:

Film noir featured other spaces of the modern city in its blighted urban landscape. Desolate train stations and abandoned warehouses, vacant streetcars and late-night diners, deserted alleys and empty sewers, seedy nightclubs and tawdry amusement parks: these were the landmarks of film noir and they symbolized [...] the brand of industrial urbanism that entered a period of decline at the outset of the postwar period (2004: 8).

But of course there also was also a dialectical counterpoint: “popular culture in the age of white flight included a suburban antithesis to its noir vision of urban life. If film noir dramatized the degraded condition of the black city, Disneyland premiered the cultural mythography of suburban whiteness”, Avila concludes (2004: 10). Disneyland, nevertheless, was located in a specific, really existing place:

The very newness of Orange County’s suburban communities created a cultural space for the resurrection of traditional social values that seemed to dissipate within the promiscuous spaces of the noir city. Removed from Southern California’s dominant urban center and far distant from the cosmopolitan culture of eastern cities, Orange County fostered a distinctive political identity that increasingly appealed to groups of Americans disaffected from decades of New Deal liberalism (Avila 2004: 11).

The New Deal as a response to crisis had incorporated elements of the world-turned-upside-down. Orange County – the anti-New Deal – reinstated the world-turned-inside-out.

2. Distanciation

Both suburban and settler colonial forms constitute deliberate attempts at social engineering promoted in different locales, at different times and in different ways by promoters, developers, social reformers, urban visionaries and their followers. Indeed, despite references to unstoppable, ostensibly self-generating processes, where both settlements and suburbs suddenly “appear” on the landscape as if they are the result of natural and irresistible processes, both formations are actually premised on a determined political will: The activities of the federal government had contributed significantly – in concert or in contradiction with local authorities – to making the very settlement of the West possible. Similarly, and also in the context of a complex interaction with local authorities, Washington later promoted suburbanisation, racial segregation, and suburban dominance over urban depression in a variety of coordinated ways: by institutionalising “red lining”, a planning procedure that only allows government subsidies to be directed to “secure”, that is, all-white subdivisions, by subsidising construction and infrastructure and underwriting of the costs involved in operating automobiles, by insuring mortgages and adopting suburban-oriented tax policies, by standardising requirements that reproduced suburban forms, by ensuring that public housing would be limited to the cities, and by allowing zoning practices that favoured residential interests in the suburbs and commercial interests in the cities.

And yet, that post-WWII government loan programs provided by VA and FHA were in many ways re-enacting nineteenth century “homestead” initiatives should be emphasised. On the one hand, while the land was theoretically free,

homesteaders needed to finance the construction of the house and all improvements. On the other, buyers needed to pay their mortgages, but mortgages were guaranteed and interest rates were protected from market oscillations. In both cases the *bona fide* homesteader/homeowner would supply the home while a joint public/private venture would make available the enabling infrastructure. ("Home", of course, would be both the actual structure and the reproductive unit, while the infrastructure supplied by publicly subsidised developers/speculators would include the technologies of appropriation and commodification, clearing the land of original inhabitants and previous uses, ensuring access, etc). Commenting on early twentieth century experiments in government provision of housing, Jackson remarks that by the "early twenties, Washington was out of the housing business" (1985: 192). But Washington had been in the housing business at least since the passing of Homestead legislation in 1862 (which indeed focused, as the name indicates, on *homes*), and even before. Its role had always been to facilitate and enable (the right kind of) settlement, and settlement is especially about building homes. Migration to the suburbs and settler migration are thus related in one further way. It is not only about moving from one locale to another and taking advantage of local opportunities while leaving unappealing circumstances behind, both movements constitute attempts to establish specific social orders. William J. Levitt, who knew a thing or two about building suburbs, noted that the suburban homebuyer is not "just buying a house, he's buying a way of life" (quoted in Beauregard 2006: 122).

This type of social engineering operated primarily via the promotion of exclusionary practices. If, as Jackson notes, Levitt-style communities were "social creations more than architectural ones", suburbanisation was in the business of "sorting out of families by income and color" (1985: 236, 241). As an extensive literature confirms, suburbia is an inherently exclusive political form, exclusive in terms of class, ethnicity, and reproductive choices (on the suburb as an exclusionary enclave where upper-class followed by middle-class residents search for sameness, status, and security, see, for example, Langdon 1994, McKenzie, 1994). But settler colonial settings are no less premised on the exclusion of variously racialised indigenous and exogenous alterities (on settler colonialism as fundamentally characterised by an exclusionary drive, see, for example, Rana 2010, Veracini 2010). The suburbs contributed to resegregation; indeed the suburbs were a response to desegregation in the first place. Yet again a response to crisis envisaged a "return" to an order that was being perceived as irretrievably undermined (on resegregation and its technologies, see, for example, Jackson 1980, Massey, Denton, 1988). The corollary of this exclusionary dimension is internal cohesion. The "suburbs were both democratic and racially [and in terms of gender, class, and in generational terms] exclusive", Beauregard concludes (2006: 143). Thus, if inclusion within the polity is premised on the systematic exclusion of others, suburban and settler communities operate in similar ways. Collective civic participation in the suburban polity, church attendance, union membership, local institutions, and local rituals of socialisation

and consumption recreated/re-enacted the civic virtues of small towns, which in turn had inherited the democratic practices of self-governing settler communities.

However, it is not only about imagining reconstituted, more suitable social orders; as mentioned, both attempts at social engineering are intimately linked with the awareness of rising contradictions, especially revolutionary contradictions (for a compelling analysis of suburban “tranquillity” as premised on a social order bent on the systematic avoidance of open conflict, see Baumgartner 1988). Not only variously constructed forms of alterity and other contradictions are kept at a distance, attempts to isolate the very social body from the crisis are an inherent premise of both formations. The nineteenth century suburbs had developed in the background of exploding cities, sites of unprecedented concentration, production, contradictions, ethnic mixing, industrial dislocations and revolutionary struggles. The city was a spectre generating moral panics and the suburb was thought one of the forms of pre-emptive counterrevolution. “Suburbia”, Jackson notes, “pure and unfettered and bathed by sunlight and fresh air, offered the exciting prospect that disorder, prostitution and mayhem could be kept at a distance” (1985: 70). But of course, if suburbia was immune from the city, it was also perceived as immunising society from the city by constituting an exemplary possibility. Similarly, the agrarian crisis had produced a similar longing for the possibility of insulation from market forces and other contradictions, and dreams of exporting “excess” population to the open spaces of somewhere else as an antidote to growing radicalism is a long-lasting corner stone of settler colonial ideologies (see Sellers 1991). Christine Boyer has noted that “against the chaos of the city with its simultaneity of land uses, jumble of vehicles, multitudes of people, corrupt politicians, and labor unrest, there stood the idea: the [suburban] city as a perfectly disciplined spatial order” (1983: 60). While imaginings of pastoral Arcadias recurringly performed a similar role, the “idea” did not constitute a utopia; as really existing places of alternate ordering, suburbia and colonial settlements are characterised by a distinct heterotopian charge (for a perceptive analysis of the nature of heterotopian locales as premised on distanciation, see Hook, Vrdoljak 2002).

In theory, insulation from revolutionary tendencies needed to involve the whole of society. It is significant that while, initially, suburban communities were planned only for the rich, there were also attempts to establish suburban communities for the working classes. Horace Greeley supported these attempts, in Jackson’s words, “as an alternative for those who were unwilling to ‘Go West’” (1985: 85). During the 1930s, at a time of renewed and unprecedented social tension, and this should be emphasised, suburbanisation was given renewed impetus. After the war, with the VA guaranteed mortgages and other initiatives (soldier settlement have traditionally been a privileged focus of settlement projects), this trend was reinforced further. After the war there were acute house shortages. As extended families were living together, familial orders were again under unprecedented strain. There were women in employment, blacks on the move, and 16 million returning soldiers. Government subsidies reinstated/re-enacted the nuclear family (and patriarchal prerogatives within it), spurred an unprecedented (suburban) construction boom, and defused a critical situation.

If contradiction emanates from a classed social body, both settler colonial and suburban forms focus on sustained attempts to reproduce classless settings (more precisely, settings characterised by lack of class difference).⁷ In these contexts, class contradictions are pre-emptively excluded. To convey this point Jackson quotes Walt Whitman again: in Brooklyn (the first suburb) “men of moderate means may find homes at moderate rent, whereas in New York City there is no median between a palatial mansion and a dilapidated hovel” (1985: 28). This purported classlessness (whether classlessness is only imaginary – Hayden, for example, convincingly refutes “mid-twentieth-century claims that suburbia is a classless place” [2003: 3] – is not that relevant to the analysis of an imaginary) is also a typically settler colonial trait, and egalitarian classlessness routinely characterises representations of settler colonial social orders. Only classlessness can ensure against the possibility of class conflict, and if displacement allows a sovereign assertion that does not require a revolutionary break, classlessness can produce a distancing from contradictions that immunises the whole of the body politic. Levitt, for example, insightfully noted that no “man who owns his own house and lot can be a communist. He has too much to do” (quoted in Beauregard 2006: 156). Coherently, Senator McCarthy emphasised how public housing “menaced the republic”. In his opinion they were deliberately created to become “breeding ground for communists” (quoted in Beauregard 2006: 54). Thus, revolution and pre-emptive counterrevolution became spatially distanced across the urban-suburban divide.⁸ Relatedly, status replaced class: the “class- and ethnicity-based neighbourhood of the industrial city”, Ashton notes, “has given way to the status-conscious suburban community of the corporate metropolitan city as the dominant form of community organization” (1984: 71). The world-turned-inside-out opts out of class struggle. Distancing, after all, is the very opposite of confrontation.

Ultimately, both suburban and settler colonial formations are a response to increasing anxiety and are primarily designed to provide a sense of security. Indeed, the paramount requirement of suburban projects and settler colonial displacements alike is the provision of a sense of security – the *promise* of security (on suburbs as “Enclaves of fear”, see Davis 1990: 246-248). Anxiety is a long lasting feature of suburbia. Small upper-class communities located outside industrial cities had existed since the middle of the nineteenth century. Ashton emphasises a number of factors when identifying this escape: “deteriorating quality of life, mounting taxes, and a loss of political control” (1984: 59). “Loss of control” is key: it is a desire to reinstitute (that is, to re-enact) a particular condition and the anxiety that is associated to its perceived loss that produce a determination to pre-emptively move (again, whether this security had ever been there is not that relevant to the analysis of a neurotic dynamic).⁹ Thus, the suburbs are political entities born with a resilient sovereign charge that is meant to keep an anxious condition under control. Their purchase of local governance (local schools and policing, for example), and their determination to ensure that local taxes are spent locally can also be linked to anxiety.¹⁰ In this context, “flight” is an especially apt term, indicating both movement in general as well as rapid strategic withdrawal.¹¹

And yet, post-WWII anti-urbanism and surrounding apprehensions were constitutively different from previous anti-urban traditions. Traditional concerns with sin became less relevant as anxieties regarding revolutionary changes came to the fore: racial pollution, physical decay, gender confusion. Grasping for a sense of security in homogeneous communities was a response, but, of course, not a new response. The 1960s were especially anxiety-generating years, following the enactment of civil rights legislation (this was no re-enactment: civil rights turned the world upside down). Urban riots, the international ascendancy of the Soviet Union, and the prospect of nuclear war in the atomic age also contributed to creating a growing demand for ever more decentralised world-turned-inside-out suburbs. If, as Beauregard notes, racial disturbances, anti-communist paranoia, and anti-urbanism formed a “symbolic triumvirate”, suburbia promised distancing (2006: 146). Military planners, professionals who make a living in the provision of a sense of security, also identified suburban decentralisation as a strategic response during the Cold War (see Beauregard 2006: 154). Suburbanites were represented as *safe* in their *self-contained* homes and a specific type of domestic ideology promoted the nuclear family. Chaos was kept at bay, and its immobility corresponded to the exceptional displacement of suburbanites. But a long lasting tradition had also recurrently imagined virtuous settlers as safely removed from the chaos of modernity. This continuity should be noted.

In Beauregard’s estimation, the “quarter-acre lot in a low density suburb” represented “*the symbol* if not the reality of being released from the bonds of urban society” (2006: 92, my emphasis). This limitation notwithstanding, it was the *promise* of control rather than its effective realisation that propelled suburban forms. Ashton, for example, concludes that “the promise of the ability to achieve a measure of control over the social and economic environment has been an important attraction of suburban living and has exerted a major influence over the specific pattern of population decentralization” (1984: 70). But even this promise, yet alone the actual “independence” of the settler/homeowner, was never really fulfilled. (It is significant that representations of suburbia and of settler colonial orders work better as reminiscences; after all if a social project is premised on a determination to “return”, a recollection is always bound to be better than the real thing.) Boosterism aside, a sense of anxiety was never fully assuaged. Settlement ended in the dustbowl, farm consolidation, and subjection to agribusiness, grain elevators and other monopsonies. Suburbia ended in sprawl and, more recently, in generalised foreclosure. In the end, displacement could not produce sustainable distancing, and settlers and suburbanites were thrown back. Suburbia, Lewis Mumford noted, “was not merely a child-centered environment. It was based on a childish view of the world” (1961: 494).

3. Epilogue I

World-turned-inside-out traditions change the world, including “old” ones, by setting up exemplary heterotopian models of social reform. Coherently, as

Beauregard highlights, American suburbia was promoted as an “export” item in the context of the Cold War propaganda. The suburbs, he notes, “figured prominently in US global projections that were designed to create a ‘better world abroad and a happier society at home’” (2006: 144). On the contrary, images of derelict US cities, with black kids playing in a yard surrounded by garbage and the Capitol in the background, featured extensively in communist propaganda (2006: 145).

An antidote against both internal and external subversion, the suburban home eventually became a literal site of confrontation when US Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev confronted each other in 1959 in the “kitchen debate” that took place in a “detached, single family, six-room, ranch-style” prefab replica at the American National Exhibition in Moscow’s Sokolniki Park (see Beauregard 2006: 166-169, de Grazia 2005: 231-233). Pointing to the suburban house, advertised as “within the price range of the average US worker”, Nixon proclaimed that the US came “closest to the ideal of prosperity for all in a classless society” (quoted in Beauregard 2006: 167).

A climax was reached when the two leaders followed by their entourages went together inside. The kitchen, the washing machine: Nixon, who had by now the home advantage, mentioned something about women having to work less (the idea of using technology to eliminate contradictions is especially suitable for world-turned-inside-out traditions, where liberation from work comes from displacing it, not by changing relations of production). Krushchev said he only saw objects epitomising the subjection of women. As far as the American press was concerned, however, Nixon had won the day. They were right: it had been like flying into the core of the Death Star and planting a devastating time bomb. The suburban home had represented the-world-turned-inside-out against the main representative of the world-turned-upside-down in the very middle of the world turned-upside-down. And it had stood its ground.

4. Epilogue II

By definition, imagining the world-turned-inside-out requires an outside. But an inexorable law of diminishing returns makes thinking the world-turned-inside-out progressively more and more difficult. The crisis eventually catches up, and the world-turned-inside-out turns inward. Gated communities and a “fortress” mentality endeavour to retain separation but have given up on displacement and have accepted the need to manage propinquity by enforcing separation from anxiety-generating surrounding environments, and the people that live there, in alternative ways (see Davis 1992, McKenzie 1994, Blakely, Snyder 1997, Caldeira 2000, Kohn 2004, Glasze, Webster, Frantz 2006). Horizontal separation, displacement, is replaced by vertical barriers. The world-turned-inside-out has ceased to exist. Geographer Neil Smith’s analysis of the gentrification of the cities – a development he insightfully calls the “revanchist” city – marks the rejection of the world-turned-inside-out option (Smith 1996).

But there are still other possibilities. *Suburban Nation*, written by architects who “lead a firm that has designed more than two hundred new neighbourhood and community revitalization plans” is a powerful anti-sprawl manifesto and part of a significant reaction against suburban developments (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, Speck 2000). These authors criticise suburbia’s inherent incapacity to address the crisis in place. In “the new suburbs”, they note, “you can’t move up without moving out”, as good a definition as any of world-turned-inside-out circumstances (2000: 44). It is significant, however, that even a powerful and systematic critique of suburban forms is still conceived in the context of a world-turned-inside-out paradigm: while its authors propose a “return” to traditional neighbourhoods, and this is in itself a telling refrain, this return is premised yet again on a foundational displacement.

The authors of *Suburban Nation* have also given up on outward displacement. They see no way to save sprawl; the solution that is prospected is to abandon it and start building better-designed urban spaces. Most tellingly, its authors understand processes of urban renewal essentially in terms of settlement waves: “the market segment that pioneers difficult areas is the ‘risk-oblivious’: artists and recent college graduates”, they note. This group is then “followed by the ‘risk-aware’: yuppies; and finally by the ‘risk-averse’: the middle class” (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, Speck 2000: 171). This succession replicates (i.e., re-enacts) the classic Crèvecoeurian frontier tale of individual frontiersmen entering the wilderness (they are legendary “risk takers”), followed by semicivilised settlers, and finally by civilised farmers. It is also important that the (poor) people that inhabit the areas targeted by the urban renewal processes typically disappear from the “nation of neighbourhoods” that will replace the suburban one. The poor must be evenly “dispersed” if neighbourhoods are to truly become what they are supposed to be. Assimilation through dispersal for people that are indigenous to areas targeted by a settlement scheme is no less a “return”, as anyone who knows a bit about the history of indigenous policies in settler societies would know. A nation of neighbourhood will re-enact the settler displacement in a way that will right the unsettlement that the suburban displacement had wrongly re-enacted. *Suburban Nation* is a world-turned-inside-out manifesto.

Conclusions

This article has argued that there are important similarities connecting suburbia and settler colonialism. While this link has not been proposed before, and two separate intellectual fields have remained unconnected, emphasising morphological continuity is important for both. For the developing field of settler colonial studies, this finding is crucial to discussion relating to the chronological limits of settler colonial phenomena. While some scholars have reiterated the traditional notion that modern settler societies are indeed postcolonial polities (see Pearson 2001, and more recently Rana 2010), another line of inquiry has emphasised continuity. Settler invasion is a “structure not an event”, quipped

Wolfe in an often quoted passage (Wolfe 1999: 163). In this context, an understanding of the links connecting settler colonialism and suburbia supports a compromise position, and confirms that while settler structures were comprehensively transformed, they were not discontinued.

The significance of this finding for housing studies is also important (even if this line of research should be pursued beyond this preliminary outline): besides contributing to a contextual understanding of suburbia, the notion that contemporary settlement patterns need to be understood in relation to specific political traditions and their evolution can facilitate an appraisal of the structures of feeling that inform contemporary contestations. Highlighting deep continuities can contribute to making sense, for example, of the recent politics of urban secessionism (for an example of an historically-aware approach to this topic, see Bouderau, Kiel 2001).

Finally, this reflection engages with recent reflection on “elective” forms of belonging (see Savage, Bagnall, Longhurst 2005, Savage 2010). After all, “new” social bodies like settler colonies or a newly built suburbs are inevitably and especially concerned with promoting elective forms of belonging to place. Thinking of a “new” place enables a comprehensive disavowal of indigenous “dwellers”. However, “selective” forms of belonging that take “dwelling” into account in order to oppose it are also available in this context (see Watt 2010: 154-155). Founder of settler orders and US president Thomas Jefferson, for example, insisted that belonging to the US, unlike other national entities, was “a matter of individual conscience and choice” (quoted in Onuf, Sadosky 2002, p. 40). Volitional belonging, as epitomised for him by the very act of voluntarily moving to America, was and is structurally different from ascriptive types of belonging (the accident of birth, for example). What is important in this context is that the narrative of “nostalgia” identified by Savage is also at the very basis of narratives of settler and suburban elective belonging. It is the realisation that one’s place of residence has “lost its magic” (Savage 2010: 116), that prompts the image of a world-turned-inside-out in the first place. Thus, these two narratives of attachment operate sequentially as well as in their dialectical opposition.

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Notes

¹ An etymological note seems warranted: “metropolis” derives from the Greek word for mother-city. Thus, as it identifies a colony’s parent polity, “metropolis” is immediately linked to both reproduction and expansion. Later, the term came to identify the administrative units of the Catholic Church: a bishop overseeing other bishops within a province was the “metropolitan” and the “metropole” was the location of his seat (like Greek city states, new sees were established out of older ones). Eventually, “metropole” identified major sites of administrative activity. Thus, with the emergence of modern colonial forms, the “metropole” became the capital/centre of an empire, and the term returned to its original meaning.

² The contemporary Israeli experience also confirms that “frontier” settlement and gated developments, the ultimate suburban form, can be coeval (see Rosen, Razin 2008, Rosen, Razin 2009).

³ Of course, I am not claiming that suburbia only characterises settler societies; there are suburban experiences in metropolitan and in colonial societies too. Britain had suburbs – the Garden Cities – and many colonial cities did too. Britain, however, was linked to an extensive empire of settlement (Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia) and the colonial cities hosted communities of settlers (see King 1976). Suburbia and settler colonialism remain linked even beyond the limits of the settler world.

⁴ “Now ‘suburban’ does not even have a relationship to the city”, he concludes (1985: 272).

⁵ Ebenezer Howard’s *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (1898) proposed a vision of towns free of slums and endowed with the advantages of both town and country, culture and nature. It is significant that the Garden Cities movement also envisaged a model of social reform that was premised on a foundational sovereign displacement: these would be *new* settings located at a *specified distance* from existing urban centres. Not only; these would be *independent* towns managed and financed by their residents. Commenting on this genealogy, Evan MacKenzie, links Garden Cities, the suburbs, and gated communities and Common Interest Developments (see MacKenzie 1994).

⁶ On the “returns” of a particular settler colonial project, see Piterberg (2008).

⁷ Even attempts at “systematic colonization” that should have allowed for the preservation and reproduction of class differences were premised on the attempt to establish classed social bodies that were crucially deprived of the very rich and the very poor.

⁸ Other contexts experienced comparable developments in quite different ways. If in the US the provision of public housing could be perceived as promoting the possibility of political subversion, its provision in the UK and France for example was viewed as a mechanism that would reduce the potential for working class revolution. At the same time, in these contexts, unlike what happened in the US, it was the working class that was displaced to the periphery.

⁹ James E. Vance, for example, notes that cities were “abandoned” by their earlier inhabitants, not invaded by their new ethnic ones (1972: 186).

¹⁰ Outlining the “white flight”, Avila focuses on Lakewood (the prototypical 1950s suburban development): the Lakewood Plan accorded it independent municipality status within Los Angeles County. Lakewood would not need to support county government services, and this was presented as a measure that would guarantee *local control*, “a mantra among suburban Southern Californians” (2004: 14). Of course, similar deals were also routinely applied elsewhere.

¹¹ On the “white flight” from densely populated, heterogeneous cities, see also Sibley (1995), Skogan (1995), Avila (2004). In a different context, indeed with reference to colonial settlement in Pennsylvania, Ed White also presents a compelling analysis of the dynamics of flight (2005).