

CITIES ON THE EDGE: EMERGING SUBURBAN CONSTELLATIONS IN CANADA

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Canada is a suburban nation. While a majority of the population now lives statistically in urban environments, that majority for the most part is found in places that are “suburban” in terms of built form or location at the periphery of large urban centres, small towns, or even villages. If we take into account exurban sprawl, there is even more dispersion of habitat. This is not to diminish the trend, at least in some of our urban centres, toward re-urbanization (i.e., the increase in population and density in traditional inner cities). We have all heard stories of walkability, downtown living, creative economies, increased transit use, condominiums and revived cultural scenes in downtowns and adjacent inner city neighbourhoods. This chapter aims to demonstrate that this is only one-side of the story. Most Canadians live in suburban constellations (see Figure 1). Those who move to major urban areas from elsewhere in Canada (rural and remote areas, as well as small towns) and those who arrive from distant shores (the majority of the approximately 250,000 immigrants who arrive each year), also tend to settle directly in suburban and exurban areas found around the country’s largest cities.¹ That latter trend, which started in the final decades of the last century, has changed not only the face of our urban peripheries, but also the demographic and cultural composition of Canada overall.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

¹ According to Statistics published by Citizenship and Immigration Canada for the period 2003-2012, the average number of new permanent residents (immigrants) each year was 249,455. Yearly intake during this period ranged from a low of 221,349 in 2003 to a high of 280,689 in 2010. See “Facts and figures 2012 – Immigration Overview: Permanent and Temporary Residents” Retrieved from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2012/index.asp>

In this chapter, we speak about suburbanization and suburbanisms. In simple terms, we define suburbanization “as the combination of non-central population and economic growth with urban spatial expansion” When we use ‘suburbanism(s)’ we refer to “a growing prevalence of qualitatively distinct ‘suburban ways of life’” (Ekers, Hamel and Keil, 2012: 407). By this, we refer to emerging modes of heterogeneous, non-traditional ways of living at the urban periphery that are distinct from those classically understood in relation to both the city and the countryside. To better understand suburbanisms as a “plural phenomenon” an *Atlas of Suburbanisms*, created at the University of Waterloo, mapped its dimensions across the Canadian metropolitan landscape—city, suburb, exurb, and rural fringe. To distinguish between suburbs as places, and suburbanisms as ways of living, the project mapped the 25 largest metropolitan areas in Canada at the dissemination area (DA) level using three sets of variables: the built-form/commute-mode dimension, the domesticity dimension, and the social status dimension (Moos and Kramer, 2012).² The resulting maps, shown in Figure 2, make it apparent that characteristics associated with suburbs and suburban living are found across the entire metropolitan fabric of Canada, including in central cities or urban core areas (albeit less intensely than elsewhere in metropolitan space). In these terms, we are a suburban nation in an urbanized country.

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

Uncovering the Historical Geographies of Canadian Suburbs and Suburbanization

How did we get to be a suburban nation? In the far-reaching postwar transformation of Canadian cities, no change has been more impactful than the shift from relatively compact forms of urban

² Dissemination Areas (Das) are the smallest standard geographical unit for which Statistics Canada makes long-form census data available for mapping and geographical analysis. They vary in geographic size, but typically contain a population of 400 to 700 persons.

development, built when walking or public transit were the principal means for getting around, to the more sprawling, large-scale suburban forms that emerged alongside the mass adoption of private automobile-based travel after the Second World War. The changes were drastic and abrupt. They altered society, the economy and governance at all scales. As urban historian Robert Fishman (1987: 183) has noted the postwar suburban building boom “was so powerful that it was like a tide that washed over all precedents. It was as if suburbanization *began* in 1945.”

The prominence of postwar suburbanization has a number of implications for how we typically see our suburbs. Periodic calls to “re-invent the suburbs” (see Bourne, 1996) are inevitably directed at the multiple stereotypes and clichés that have attached themselves to postwar suburbia. In the 1950s young families flooded into new suburban developments filled with modest homes, automobile usage proliferated, and television extended the reach of mass culture and consumerism. Chain-stores in shopping plazas and suburban malls began to replace independent shops and street-based retailing in newly built suburban areas. The newness and initial sameness of postwar suburbs led urban-based intellectuals, writers, artists, and social commentators to deride them as sterile, banal, and conformist places. Initially viewed as the solution to urban problems such as poverty, crime, vice, and pollution, the suburb now seemed to urbanists to be a hellish place devoid of culture and home to all manner of new social pathologies (Nicolaidis, 2006). Since the 1970s, various attempts have been made to demonstrate that “the suburbs” have evolved into a complex and variegated socio-spatial landscape. But stereotypes and clichés that originated in the 1950s, and have gained almost mythical status in the decades since, continue to powerfully shape how suburbs are represented and understood.

Rather than attempt to disprove “the suburban myth” (see Donaldson, 1969), it is more productive to see cities and their suburbs as both real and imagined places, and consider why certain representations of them endure, and the degree to which they reflect the realities of “actually

existing” suburbs (past and present). A vital task, therefore, is to question the often taken-for-granted assumption that cities and suburbs are socio-spatial opposites. If instead we conceive of suburbs as transitional spaces—a middle landscape between city and open countryside (Rowe, 1991)—then it becomes easier to consider “city” and “suburb” as existing within a continuum of urban spaces, rather than set them off against each other as categorically different places. It also encourages us to view suburbs or suburban areas as places that evolve: in response to the life-cycle of residents; as political, economic, or social conditions change; and as their relative location within a metropolitan region is altered by continued urban growth and spatial expansion (McManus and Ethington, 2007).

The challenge is to better understand when and where stereotypes and clichés, often masquerading as conventional wisdom, obscure contemporary suburban realities and distort suburban histories. German planning theorist, Tomas Sieverts (2003) argues that the “myth of the old city” or a “one-sided love for the historical city” amongst urbanists distorts how suburbs are perceived. In North America, a preoccupation with the vast, sprawling landscapes built around cities after World War II, colours how we understand prior waves of suburbanization. This is particularly true when older suburban landscapes, such as streetcar suburbs, are folded into the urban realm and washed of their suburban-ness. We need to understand that many areas now within the city limits were once peripheral and suburban (see Harris and Lewis, 1998a). Though it is impossible to know the transformations and change that await today’s suburbs, the urban past tells us they will—and that transformation and change will occur in response to internal needs, metropolitan pressures, and wider social and economic forces.

Recent scholarship on North American suburbanization has emphasized that prior to World War II “differences between cities and the suburbs as a whole were quite minor and were dwarfed by variations within the city and among suburbs” (Harris and Lewis, 2001: 284). Further, texts and commentary on suburbanization and metropolitan development from the first half of the 20th

century unsettle the notion that the only (or even main) participants in the suburban trend were affluent commuters (Wunsch, 1995). Multiple factors converge to explain the diversity of Canadian suburbia prior to World War II, including the availability of cheap land, industrial decentralization, and working class desire for homeownership (see Harris 1996; Lewis 2000; 2001). Street railways also played an important role in allowing urban development to extend further outwards from the core, and enable a wider range of workers to live beyond the limits of the walking city (Warner, 1962). In addition to the development and expansion of street railways in Canadian cities, the episodic nature of urban land development—real estate booms and busts—underwrote the variation in lot-sizes and housing styles found in many pre-World War II suburban districts (McCann, 1999). Revisionist (mostly American) suburban histories increasingly demonstrate that an over-emphasis on elite or middle-class suburbanization in suburban histories has distorted who and what is to be found in the suburban periphery. The suburb as a landscape of residential privilege and exclusion has long co-existed with “other” forms of suburban life, including lower income, self-built, industrial, ethnically segregated, and new immigrant suburbs.

That “other” suburbs existed does not mean that individual suburbs were diverse, however. Historical research suggests that the metropolitan periphery during first half of the 20th century was a segmented social space in which individual suburbs could be relatively homogeneous at the same time as the whole (suburbia) was diverse. Rather than resembling the simple zonal pattern of increasing affluence with distance from the urban core, an assumption built into the concentric model of the Chicago School (see Harris and Lewis, 1998b), the complexity of Canadian metropolis prior to World War II was shaped by the decentralization of industry along rail corridors, and the segmentation of social space along class, ethnic/racial, and religious lines (Harris 1996; 2004; Lewis 2000; 2001). The conventional image of suburban affluence and conformity, shaped heavily by

postwar suburban stereotypes, has made it easier to elide the historical importance of industrial and working-class suburbanization.

Richard Harris' *Unplanned Suburbs* (1996) provides a rich account of blue-collar British immigrant settlement in unserviced fringe areas around Toronto during the first decades of the 20th century. Made possible by unregulated development of cheap land on the urban periphery, the unplanned suburbs that resulted had little in common with the bourgeois utopias, borderlands, or streetcar suburbs that have led most historians and urbanists to cast suburbanization solely in relation to middle or upper class proclivities. Sharing the desire for homeownership with more affluent suburbanites, working-class suburbanization rested upon a willingness to settle marginal land, and the ability to substitute thrift and sweat equity for capital (see also Nicolaidis, 2002; Wiese, 2004). It also rested upon a willingness to forgo amenities and comforts offered in the city. Unplanned suburbs had at best limited transit service and few, if any, municipal services such as water, sewage, power, police and fire protection. Continued urban growth eventually led to unplanned districts being swallowed up by the rest of the metropolis and the costs of providing municipal infrastructure and services to inefficiently planned areas and poorly constructed self-built homes led to tighter regulation of development and a greater emphasis on planning.

The fall of self-built, unplanned suburbs after World War II and its seemingly sudden replacement by standardized, large-scale suburban tract housing developments has been captured in the term “creeping conformity” (Harris, 2004). An important part of that narrative points to the growing influence of the state in the 20th century; first in response to speculative land subdivision prior to World War I and later more profoundly in response to the Great Depression of the 1930s and wartime housing needs in the 1940s. By the 1950s national housing standards developed by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (enforced via its role in mortgage finance) and new

planning legislation enacted by provincial governments in the mid-to-late 1940s worked to produce more standardized suburban built-environments (Harris, 2004; Miron, 1988).

When considering the evolution of Canadian suburbia it is vital to remember it has been characterized by regional diversity (McCann, 2006). Differences in provincial planning practices and the role of the distinctive suburban strategies employed by large regional land syndicates (notably the Hudson's Bay company and the Canadian Pacific Railroad) in the pre-World War I era shaped the overall suburban form we now find everywhere. Postwar suburbanization did not simply happen in the form that it did because of world-historical forces, though broad structural factors, such as social class stratification (emergence of the middle class), patterns of industrialization (large-scale, Fordist production facilities), technological change (automobilization) and the governance of land ownership (far-reaching government programs such as mortgage subsidies), did play a significant role. The suburbs were also forged by various interests, values, and beliefs—of suburban residents, land developers, builders, planners, financial organizations and governments—that combined to change the “pluralistic” character of early Canadian suburbs—usually toward a more regulated, planned, and middle-class (though not completely) urban space. In most cases this led to lower-income, self-built forms of suburbanization being squeezed out (McCann, 1999).

Feminist geographers have long argued that “suburban studies” largely fails to consider suburbs as “women’s spaces” or critically examine the gendered nature of discourses on suburbanization (Strong-Boag et al., 1999). Conventional accounts have focused on the suburbs as a male paradise, a haven from the hustle and bustle of the city and a separation of work life from family life. The suburbs were closely implicated in the Victorian defense of the ideal middle-class family through the spatial separation of “private” homes and “public” cities. Accordingly, the inner-city came to represent locales of the deviant, the poor, the recent immigrant and racially marginalized, and in particular a place of female sin.

The design of suburbs and suburban housing has enacted (and reinforced) gendered divisions of labour. “Traditional” suburbia was underpinned by women’s unpaid domestic work. Over time, these “bourgeois utopias” have become harder to find as women increasingly entered the paid workforce in order to maintain middle-class life-styles in the face of rising costs and stagnant or declining real-wages (see Rose and Villeneuve, 1998). Paradoxically, increased work outside the home by women has resulted in contradictions between the “...assumptions underpinning suburban communities and the reality of female residents’ lives” (Strong-Boag, et al., 1999: 178). These contradictions include the increased isolation of stay-at home mothers and the difficulties experienced by working-mothers trying manage the multiple demands of family-life, wage labour, and long commutes. This contrasts with the active role of women in negotiating and constructing the suburban landscape and highlights the differing experiences of women in the suburbs, with some women finding the “burden of being ‘good’ wives and mothers worsened by a landscape that has regularly ignored them,” while “[o]thers have flourished, able to mobilize community and kin resources in ways they experience as rewarding” (ibid: 179). In the absence of traditional family structures, social relationships had to be reconfigured in new suburban neighbourhoods. For example, women whose childcare needs were not being met in these emerging communities engaged in reciprocal economies to perform the “invisible work” done at home (Pratt, 2003). New Urbanist developments like Cornell in the Toronto suburb of Markham have done little to change the overall patterns of gender relations seen in classical suburban neighbourhood (Markovich and Hendler, 2006). While such developments post higher density patterns and different design features, which could suggest different life styles, in reality their residents behave just like their counterparts in conventional suburbs.

There is much controversy about the gender aspects of the suburban landscape. In terms of safety, some groups of women have been found to have a preference for inner city urban design,

abundance of “populated” public spaces and sense of community which makes them feel safer—more at home—in contrast with images of bleak, unpopulated suburban landscapes that makes them feel isolated and vulnerable. But race and class privilege may act as a blind-spot to urban violence more broadly. Spaces of whiteness or middle-classness are constructed in Toronto through associating urban violence with “other” neighbourhoods like inner suburban Jane-Finch or inner-city Parkdale (Kern, 2005).

The Diverse Canadian Suburb: Suburbanization and Suburbanisms Redefined

Although Canadian suburban development adopted a more regulated planned and institutional form in the postwar era, there is now a broad picture of suburban social diversity that has decisively moved suburban Canada from the classical trajectory of Anglo-American suburbanization to present a remarkable new model of peripheral development (Fong, Luk, and Ooka, 2005; Rose, 2010; Walks, 2013). Canadian suburbs are now increasingly defined by the immigrant experience and the heterogeneity of new suburban populations. No longer are the outskirts of cities more homogeneous and straightforwardly wealthier than cities. Whereas previously new immigrants settled in the inner city and moved to the suburbs as their economic situation permitted, the contemporary pattern is for (notably non-European) immigrants to move directly to the suburbs. Immigrants are therefore responsible for qualitative changes to suburban lives which destabilize stereotypes of white middle-class nuclear families living in single-family homes as the suburban norm. This trend takes two main forms. In the old, formerly white and middle-class suburbs of the postwar years there are now large and remarkably diverse non-white and immigrant populations attracted by low-rent apartments, affordable single-family homes, and the availability of public transit. Here change is registered visually by the appearance of new places of worship and via the now kaleidoscopic diversity of

signage for ethnic businesses found in strip malls and modest plazas located along major arterial roads (see Figure 3). In newer, outer suburbs, more affluent immigrant households are shaping new suburban spaces, rather than adapting existing ones to meet new needs. In Toronto and Vancouver, one manifestation of this is a novel form of suburban development: the ethnoburb (see Chapter 8).

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

Chinese immigration, for example, has altered the suburban landscape in both Toronto and Vancouver in profound ways. In both cities, new Chinese immigrants increasingly bypass traditional reception areas in the inner city and settle directly in peripheral communities. In Richmond (south of Vancouver) and Markham (north of Toronto) significant concentrations of Chinese immigrant populations have formed. Accompanying the development of these places into ethnoburbs has been the emergence of distinctive and novel suburban forms such as “Asian theme malls” (Preston and Lo, 2000). This reflects a shift away from traditional geographies of Chinese business and commercial activity, which concentrated in inner-city “Chinatowns” (Wang, 1999). Now well established as ethnoburbs, the initial transformations in Richmond and Markham revealed tensions between official multiculturalism (the ideology and policy) and its actual practice as an everyday urban reality on-the-ground in Canadian communities (see Chapter 8; Ray, Halseth, and Johnson 1997; Wood and Gilbert, 2005).

Traditional understandings of home and neighbourhood may explain the resistance of established suburban residents to the changes prompted by the influx of newcomers to previously white suburban areas. In two (quite different) residential subdivision developments in Surrey (a mostly lower-middle class or working class suburban city about 40 minutes east of Vancouver) white residents avoided the use of explicitly racialized language to explain their residential locational

choices and preferences (Dowling, 1998). Feelings about perceived “others”—non-traditional families or Indo-Canadians—were made apparent, instead, through the use of a local “sociospatial vocabulary” that linked specific suburban places to marginalized or racialized groups.

In north Scarborough, Richmond Hill, and Markham, the transformation of the suburban landscape in the 1980s and ‘90s was marked by planning conflicts over proposals for new Chinese-oriented shopping centres (Preston and Lo, 2000). Opposition was usually framed by residents around traffic, parking, and character/scale of the proposed developments, but political debate and newspaper coverage at the time reveals at least an undercurrent of racial intolerance; anxiety about the scale and pace of ethnic change was also a factor. Proposals to establish new places of worship in the suburbs by minority groups can also spur community opposition, though increasingly ethnic communities in the suburbs are locating their churches, temples, gurdwaras, mosques, and other cultural institutions in industrial areas (Hackworth and Stein, 2012).

The diverse suburb also takes other more subtle, less visible forms. It involves the diversification of everyday life and sociocultural patterns through niche building and novel suburbanisms. A case in point is the socio-spatial clustering of suburban mothers and children whose husbands/fathers live permanently abroad for employment—a trend documented in suburban Mississauga (Aulakh, 2011). In suburban Vancouver and Toronto the term ‘astronaut’ families is used to describe immigrant families where the husband continues to work in Hong Kong (see Kobayashi and Preston, Chapter). It is the emergence of these everyday practices, introduced by immigrant, non-European suburban populations that mark most tangibly a contrast between suburbanization as a readily identifiable built environment (allegedly white picket fenced single family homes for nuclear families in cul-de-sac neighbourhoods) and suburbanisms as rapidly diversifying ways of life.

Given the heavy Canadian reliance on immigration for population growth, the anticipated flow of newcomers into mostly suburban environments has far-reaching implications (Lo, 2011; Teixeira, 2008). This is particularly the case if we consider the social, economic, and political context into which immigrants arrive. These are fragile neoliberal times characterized by widening income inequality, the growth of precarious employment, and rising levels of housing stress and homelessness (Walks, 2009). Among South-Asian and Chinese Canadians, there is a clear trend towards suburban residency (Hiebert, 2000), which may be at least partly explained by higher incidences of multi-generational and/or multi-family living arrangements. It is likely that multi-generational and/or multi-family households find larger suburban homes a preferred form of accommodation. But the diversity of immigrants arriving results in highly uneven suburban geographies of poverty and housing stress. For example, low-rent apartments in suburban areas are often highly localized within large tracts of mostly single-family homes creating micro-geographies of acute housing need and poverty in otherwise comfortably housed areas (Bunting, Walks, and Filion, 2004; Fiedler, Schuurman, and Hyndman, 2006). The picture is further complicated by evidence of housing need and poverty that is thinly distributed across areas where residents are generally well-housed—a phenomenon that may be explained by the growing role of basement and secondary suites as a form of low-rent housing in suburban areas, though this is somewhat speculative (see Ransford, 2003; Tanasescu, 2009).

This is not to suggest that the inner city no longer faces problems. It is more to highlight that social problems such as poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, and so forth have become suburban problems too—albeit with different implications for policy-makers, service providers, and those who are marginalized, poor, and suburban. It is also to emphasize structural changes to postwar, inner suburban areas, which have experienced considerable deindustrialization since the 1980s (Walks,

2001). These changes have been identified, particularly as they relate to income inequality and neighbourhood poverty, in influential reports and studies (Hulchanski, 2010; United Way, 2004).

Thus far, the focus has been on older, inner suburban areas as places where so-called “urban” problems have emerged in recent decades. The suburbanization of poverty’s leading edge, however, continues to move outward; it is an emergent reality in newer, outlying suburban areas. The concept of “priority neighbourhoods”, introduced as part of Toronto’s Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy, has been exported to allegedly wealthy suburbs where social distress has not previously been acknowledged or presumed to exist (Baluja, 2011). This has yet to translate, as it has in relation to older, closer-in suburban areas, into the talk of suburban “ghettos”, as is sometimes evoked in media coverage of certain neighbourhoods such as Toronto’s Jane and Finch, Kingston-Galloway, or Malvern neighbourhoods, which have become objects of perhaps misguided top-down policies transferred from other cases to pump resources into places that are considered breeding grounds of poverty, educational failure, and crime (Black, 2011). Putting this aside, it would seem that poverty and social exclusion are on the radar of policy-makers, which is important given that suburban municipalities have been slow to build the kinds of social infrastructure available in inner city areas (Cowen and Parlette, 2011; Lo, 2011).

Complicating Suburban Form and Function: Postsuburbia and the In-Between City

Contemporary suburbanization has been characterized by a qualitative transformation and diversification of the structure and functions of Canadian urban peripheries (Addie and Fiedler, 2013; Keil and Addie, in review). New suburban forms such as “edge cities” (Garreau, 1991) or “technoburbs” (Fishman, 1987) and suburban downtowns (Filion and Gad, 2006) —the sprawling mixed-use suburban zones on the urban periphery that are automobile dependent, highway oriented,

computer network-enabled, and relatively autonomous from older central cities—have been identified over the past two decades and are receiving increased attention in relation to contemporary concerns with suburban sustainability (Atkinson, 2007; Kruse and Sugrue, 2006). The social differentiation of the suburb challenges prior perceptions and conceptions of peripheral development (Harris, 2010). Most suburban development now takes place in a dynamic landscape that neither resembles the old inner city and the glamorous cookie cutter suburbs. Significantly transformed since their original development, these “in-between” spaces have often become neglected as the focus of urban growth has been on the densification of the downtown and the continued sprawl of subdivisions across greenfields in the outer reaches of Canadian cities. Yet, most Canadians now live, work and play in quite undefined and nondescript middle landscapes where everything seems to happen at once: large-scale infrastructure like highways and airports are next to residential quarters, all manner of service infrastructures including universities and high tech corridors sit adjacent to low rent apartments; parks and parking are side by side; high-speed highways, food and transit deserts define the same space; religious mega-structures are across the street from ethnic mini-malls (Young, Wood, and Keil, 2011).

We can also call these spaces “postsuburbia” (Teaford, 1997). Post-suburbs are dynamic and diverse spaces and as a consequence, are difficult to pin down: “The problem of adequately *placing* postsuburbia is part of its analytical attraction and potentially a key distinctive element of it when compared with established notions of cities, suburbs, and the rural” (Phelps, Wood and Valler, 2010: 370). Indeed, within the maelstrom of city-regional growth we can witness postwar suburbs evolving into post-suburbs or new cities in their own right, while declining cities regress to dormitory suburbs for nearby urban centres (Phelps and Wood, 2011). While there is a degree of definitional ambiguity here, the central characteristic of post-suburbia is a balance between traditional suburban (residential) functions and emergent employment and economic activity. The term captures the sense that

contemporary suburbanization processes represent a new mode of metropolitan development as well as a break from our traditional views of the relationship between the city and its core (Lucy and Phillips 1997: 259). Postsuburbia thus indicates an incremental shift from previous suburban processes at a global scale, just as the postwar suburbs presented an evolution from pre-existing urban and industrial settlement patterns.

The nature of the shift towards postsuburbia can be witnessed in the evolving material and discursive production of suburban “downtowns” in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and the region’s distinctly spiky metropolitan density-gradients (Filion, McSpurren, and Appleby, 2006). Through the 1970s, Metro Toronto attempted to foster development around mixed-use sub-centres in the inner suburbs. Suburban downtowns at Yonge-Eglinton, Etobicoke Centre, North York Center and Scarborough Centre were planned to act as distinct edge cities with integrated residential and business—following a Keynesian-style planning framework based on the focused de-concentration of key functions from the urban core. Some success was realized in attracting development, investment and integrating activities in a moderately pedestrian-friendly environment, but despite increased intensification and diversification of land-use, attempts to bring elements of “urban” development into suburban downtowns failed to live up to expectations (Charney, 2005). The auto-oriented nature of these mixed-use suburban centres, as well as their relatively inhospitable walking environments infringed upon the potential benefits of concentrated, pedestrian-based urban synergy (Filion, McSpurren, and Huether, 2000). “Wasted density” (islands of high-density residential areas stranded in a sea of low-density single-family homes) must be seen as particularly problematic given that inner suburban areas that poorly-served by public transit and other social services are home to an increasing proportion of the city’s marginalized residents.

Despite these challenges, suburban centres continue hold a prime position within the structured coherence of Toronto city-region, albeit on an expanded scale. Taking their cue from the

Province of Ontario's landmark "Greenbelt" and "Places to Grow" growth management legislation (introduced over 2005-2006), many of Toronto's neighbouring municipalities have actively embraced a reframed planning agenda centered on intensified, nodal urban development. Newly planned and competing suburban downtowns are rapidly rising up along Highway 7 and Highway 427 to challenge the primacy of the city of Toronto and radically reorient the centre-periphery dynamics of the region. Mississauga, Brampton, Vaughan and Markham are *cities in waiting*; emergent sites of urbanity at the cutting edge of suburban transformation. Not only are their built environments undergoing a profound reshaping in accordance with provincial mandates but densification, mixed-use development and multiple modes of mobility are attempting to restructure everyday suburbanism away from lifestyles traditionally understood and experienced through auto-mobility and the single family home. The City of Vaughan's 2020 strategic plan, for example, envisions the transition "from a growing suburban municipality to a fully urban space" (2011: 1).

The GTA's periphery is a place of multiple speeds and scales of movement that offer the potential to retrofit, reconfigure and reimagine autocentric and atomized suburban space. Yet while emergent suburbanization processes and post-suburban landscapes produce new nodes within a polycentric urban regions, they do not hold the same functional logics or spatial practices as the historical center city or even, postwar suburbia (Archer, 2011). The interactive patterns of contemporary suburbs "are less like its blocky spatial layout and more like the entwined overlay of paths and nodes in a rainforest, where clearings and connections for different uses are mixed together, connected by twisting links, lacking any easy visible order" (Kolb, 2008: 160). The typical "in-between" landscapes found in the periphery are in perpetual transition, structured both by the continuation of existing urban traditions and the implementation of new experiments and innovations (Young, et al., 2011).

Transformations in inner suburban Toronto reveal how landscapes that appear to be placeless (see Relph, 1976) can foster a sense of place as new users adapt what exists to meet changing needs. Postwar factories can be reborn as infill housing (or as big-box power centers) while strip malls—their retail equivalent—function as landing pads for immigrant entrepreneurs and “soft targets” for intensified development. In either case, old factories and strip malls have come to be seen by many as obsolete reminders of Toronto’s postwar embrace of the car—spaces that might be rendered more “urban” and “productive” via compact, mixed use redevelopment. In recent years, the specter of suburban decline has pushed reurbanization or intensified development to forefront where it has become Toronto’s official pathway to inner suburban revitalization. The City’s vision, expressed in its Official Plan, seeks the gradual redevelopment of low-rise commercial structures found along inner suburban Toronto’s major avenues into mid-rise buildings with commercial units at grade and residences above.

The road to this more urban future is hardly unproblematic. In addition to skepticism about the scale of the transformation required and whether it can produce the more complete streets that urbanists rightly advocate, there is also the issue of what is lost. Far from being unused or abandoned, many old factories and strip malls are bustling hubs of activity. They function as a flexible and integrative infrastructure for new immigrants of limited means, who locate businesses, cultural centers, and places of worship in them. Shabby and often overlooked by experts, these modest buildings perform an important function in increasingly diverse, uneven, and socioeconomically polarized Canadian metropolises. They provide low-cost spaces where newcomers and new ideas can take hold in an otherwise expensive and exclusionary city (see Figure 4).

[FIGURE 4 HERE]

The Politics of Suburbia Ascendant

The neoliberalization of suburban development has led to a reorientation of metropolitan politics that defies older political imaginaries and institutional as well as geographic boundaries. The political equation of regionalization and redistribution has been severed as aggressive suburban regimes have come to power regionally or even federally in Canada to use their political base to fundamentally shift the meaning of metropolitan politics. In general, we must recognize that the governance of suburbs is a process that combines the interplay of government, market and private activities (Ekers, et al., 2012). In Canada, historically, these activities have been mixed in a particular way:

There is now a truly Canadian story developing from coast to coast which is both internally differentiated (in a federalist context) and shows some remarkable similarities across the nation's (sub)urban reach. Cities, regions and their suburbs are now recognized as central to the governance of the vast territory of Canada, which is beginning to understand itself as a primarily urban country as the majority of its citizens now live in some form of urban or suburban area (Keil et al., 2013).

The governance of these suburbanizing metropolitan regions is constituted through a new melange of politics that depart from the business of usual in which central interests prevailed. An “in-between” type of politics has emerged which colonizes political spaces in the emergent postsuburban region: “The idea of post-suburbia includes the understanding that the traditional dichotomy in urban politics of taking either redeveloping inner cities or newly built suburbs as the natural arenas of urban action has to be challenged. Instead, post-suburbia now validates both the overlooked spaces in-between and the emerging metropolitan spaces of which they are part” (Young and Keil, 2014: 1606).

We have entered an era where urban and suburban politics are not easily separated, particularly in urban regions that aspire to be global. It is impossible now to imagine the suburbs neatly sequestered spatially and socially from a categorically different ‘inner city’. While territorially-bound political institutions, with their associated mechanisms of taxation and service provision, play a significant role in shaping urban growth and the socio-cultural identities of (sub)urban inhabitants, dynamic patterns of growth and the relational connectivity of global regionalization do not neatly align with such political jurisdictions (Harrison, 2010). The phenomenon of the diverse suburb, therefore, needs to be understood in relation to the continued formation of the global city-region and the emergence of postmetropolitan forms of urbanization (Keil, 2011). This is an especially important consideration as strategic investments in infrastructure megaprojects integrate the peripheries of Canadian cities into global trade and logistics networks. This form of suburban globality is perhaps most evident in large-scale infrastructures – airports, intermodal yards, warehousing districts – that are conducive to the functioning of global economy and the internationalized movement of goods and capital.

Suburban and post-suburban communities are animated by a diverse collection of political contradictions that are emerging at different scales; between economic growth and the provision of collective consumption amenities, continued development and environmental conservation and the forces of amalgamation and secession (Phelps, et al., 2010). Canadian city-regions have adapted to changes in the functional scale of urban areas and broad-scale economic imperatives in distinct ways and notably exhibit far higher levels of regional-governmental integration than do cities in the United States (Sancton, 2000). But it is important to note that significant variations in political cultures and economic development frameworks do exist between provinces and within regions (Andrew and Doloreux, 2012). For example, during the wave of municipal amalgamations that swept across Canada in the late-1990s, Torontonians appeared more concerned with democratic accountability

than direct participatory access within urban governance structures. On the other hand, debates in Montreal shifted attention to the inefficiency of government and attempts to mediate the cultural and linguistic terrains of the city (Boudreau, 2003).

Suburban vs. city politics: Municipal amalgamation in Toronto

Canadian cities have a long history of regional governance experiments. Most notably, the innovative two-tier government structure of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto (Metro), formed in 1954, spurred the creation of regional governments across Canada during the 1970s, including for example the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, Quebec's Outaouais and Montreal Urban Communities and the Regional Municipalities of Durham, Halton, Peel and York in the GTA (see Frisken, 2007). However, whereas Metro was largely successful in integrating the City of Toronto's inner suburban municipalities, as the city grew beyond its territorial and political limits, new political configurations were required to produce institutional-political frameworks that conform more closely to the prevailing conditions in city-regions. Restructuring followed Mike Harris's Progressive-Conservative Party's victory in Ontario's 1995 provincial election. Harris's neoliberal-populist "Common Sense Revolution" attempted to restore growth through a program of restructuring which placed Toronto at the forefront of urban neoliberalization, but further proposed the elimination of two-tier governance in Toronto by amalgamating the "old" city of Toronto with its adjacent suburban municipalities. Governmental actions taken "against" Toronto, including the rescaling of Toronto's local government, appeared to be intended to suburbanize the governance and political control of the city of Toronto (noted for its innovative social programs and "progressive" politics) (Keil, 2002).

In fact, city and suburban voters are diverging in terms of political attitudes and party preferences. Analysis of 1965, 1984 and 2000 Canadian federal election results has shown that inner-cities have become more likely to vote for left-wing parties, while suburban areas increasingly support right-wing parties and exhibit attitudes consistent with a right-wing politics (Walks, 2005, 2006). Supporters of leftist politics who often self-select into the inner-city areas consciously seek to construct those areas as an “oppositional space”; a more environmentally and socially just place to live in, while more suburban residents with right-political views and voting preferences tended to voice an exclusionary discourse about immigrants and low-income housing being “out of place” in their suburban landscape (Walks 2006).

The inner suburbs practiced a form of “suburban citizenship” that was dominated by strong normative understandings of suburban life. Principally, that residents would use the private spaces of the home or subdivision for recreation and leisure activities, except where specific activities required dedicated facilities for which user-fees would apply. Targeted programs were developed to provide “residual” access to less fortunate lower-income residents, which suggests that governance strategies, now identified as neoliberal, may in fact have their roots in long established practices of suburban governance (Cowen, 2005).

Towards a new suburban politics

The suburbs re-emerged as a strategic battleground during Canada’s 2011 federal election. Reminiscent, at first, of 1990s campaigns, when white middle class voters in conservative ridings north of Toronto formed the power base of a neoliberal Tory government under Mike Harris, the suburban voters that were wooed in 2011 were new immigrants, visible minorities and the elderly. Contentiously termed “ethnic voters” were audiences for stump speeches in suburbs like Surrey,

British Columbia and Brampton or Markham, Ontario where politicians visited folkloristic and religious events. Issues such as social conservatism, immigration and settlement and pension concerns took central stage as it was assumed that they would resonate with the local, diverse electorate (Friesen, 2011). Some progressive candidates also made inroads into the electoral base of the ethnoburbs as a younger generation of visible minority New Democrat politicians were elected in provincial and federal politics in Ontario (CBC News, 2011).

But official elections are not the only arena of new suburban politics in Canada. A new generation of activists has begun to change the style and substance of suburban political discourse. Ethnically diverse and multigenerational organizations like the citizens environmental coalition “Sustainable Vaughan” have added to and challenged the traditional development driven political agenda in the suburbs (Citizens Environmental Coalition, 2012). A lively debate has started in the suburbs on the character of their culture and politics in which young, often second generation immigrants are putting traditional notions of inner and out cities to the test (Alang, 2011). The opening up of new understandings of ethno-racial relationships and the politics that accompany them are now on the agenda in Canadian suburbs. Long gone are the times where politics could safely be located along socio-demographic lines as was often assumed in the past. We will consequently need to pay attention to the “strategies of surveillance, dispersal, and consumption” that contextualize much of politics and governance in the post-suburban landscape of today (Quinby, 2011: 139). In contrast to the perception of the suburbs as a space ruled by rational choice, personal freedom, economic autonomy and land ownership, politics in the urban periphery now deals with corporate power, lack of collective consumption services, the presence of a strong local state (social programs and police presence in marginalized communities) and poverty. In this reorientation, suburban politics may be less defined against the traditional imaginaries of the inner city and the landscape of power that those built. Suburban politics may now establish itself,

municipality by municipality, community by community, in its own right, as a self-confident part of the postsuburban region.

If a closer examination of contemporary Canadian suburban political space indicates a disconnect between the predominant imaginaries and realities of the metropolis, this will have distinct ramifications for both political practices engendered in negotiating diverse suburban spaces, and in integrating the political-economic realities between the urban core and its surrounding periphery within particular geographical contexts. The wake of the resistance to Metro Toronto's amalgamation and the social cleavages revealed that a more suburb-sensitive exploration of metropolitan political spaces in Canada would be productive. Collective action in "the city" has received detailed coverage in recent years, particularly with regard to the gentrification of inner-city neighbourhoods (Blomley, 2004) or the restructuring/rescaling of urban politics (Boudreau, 2005). The self-conscious use of inner-city neighbourhood space as a marker of life-style and political distinctions (specifically as non-suburban or mass society oriented), begs the question: are the suburbs as conservative and reactionary as such inner-city perspectives indicate? More importantly, how prevalent is collective action in the suburbs that isn't related to property-oriented concerns such as zoning/landuse or taxation policies or actions? Finally, given the social diversity of many suburban areas, what new sociopolitical movements might be present (or emerging) within the changing dynamic?

Conclusion

The Canadian suburb has arrived in the global city. Suburbanization processes today cannot be understood, as they used to be, as outcomes mostly of national policy and Fordist-Keynesian economics. Suburban constellations are now in the crosshairs of international migration, flows of

global capital and labour, locational decisions by transnational corporations, diasporic networks of businesses and communities, and cultural diversities. Equally, suburbanisms as diverse ways of life are beginning to reshape the urban periphery in Canada. While the *Atlas of Suburbanisms* continues to show a sustained prevalence of the automobile oriented suburban form in the outer reaches of small and large urban regions in Canada (Moos and Kramer, 2012), the container-space of cul-de-sacs and shopping malls is filled with new social and cultural practices and even politics in the ever changing geographies of the “arrival city” (Saunders, 2010). As the conclusion to a new collection of essays on global suburbanization suggests, “to arrive in the global suburb is no longer an original experience. It is not terra incognita, empty unmarked space. The moving trucks taking the huddled masses to the air and light of the periphery have long disappeared. Arriving in the suburb is getting home to the metropolitan future that is most likely ours for some time to come” (Keil, 2013: 201). Canadian suburbs have ceased to be a derivative of the North American suburban phenomenon. They are also not mere extensions of European-influenced metropolitan landscapes of tower neighbourhoods and bungalow estates. Under the influence of changing immigration patterns and economic globalization, and under the severe stresses of neoliberal urbanization, the Canadian periphery has entered a phase of suburbanization that is both universal in its appearance and unique in its outcomes and unprecedented in its myriad suburban ways of life. Therein lies the particular character of Canadian suburbanization and suburbanisms today.

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Figures

[Attached Table]

FIGURE 1: Canadian suburban development as defined by predominant transportation mode. Ascribing fixed definitional characteristics to suburban space is no simple task (see Harris, 2010). Indeed, through this chapter we suggest a central characteristic of both contemporary Canadian suburbanization and suburbanisms is change, complexity and dynamism. However, as a heuristic aid, typologies and categories of suburbs can usefully illuminate the extent to which Canada is now a suburban nation. One example in this regard has been provided by David Gordon who classifies Canadian metropolitan forms as constituted by (1) *Active cores*, neighborhoods where the majority of people walk or cycle to work; (2) *transit suburbs*, where the majority of commutes us mass transit; (3) *auto suburbs*, “classic” suburban neighborhoods defined by the logics of automobility; and (4) *exurbs*, low density rural areas where over half the population commute to the central core.

[Attached PDF Maps]

FIGURE 2: Built form and commute type in the Montreal and Calgary CMAs, reproduced from the *Atlas of Suburbanisms* (Moos and Kramer, 2012).



FIGURE 3: Evolving social diversity in postwar Canadian suburbs. The Canada Kanthaswamy Temple, Birchmount Road in the inner Toronto suburb of Scarborough (photo by Roger Keil).



FIGURE 4: In inner suburban Scarborough, the former Lily Cup factory once produced disposable cups for fast food chains like McDonalds and Tim Hortons. And for a fleeting time, before it was demolished in 2010 to make way for the Lilly Factory Towns (now under construction), it was home to a South Asian banquet hall, and then a gathering place and Mandir (temple) for Bangladeshi Hindus. Part of a wider redevelopment boom in the area, the redevelopment of the Lily Cup and much of the industrial land around it brings new, more compact housing to the postwar suburb, but it ironically makes it less mixed use. Factories that once provided middle-income employment for area residents have been replaced by townhouses, while little new retail or office space has been added to the area. The final users of the old factory have in the meantime relocated to a small industrial building in nearby East York, having made temporary use of a nearby Royal Canadian Legion Hall for pujas and other special events in the interim (photo by Robert S. Fiedler).