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## *Book Review*

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How should we read the modern city? What are we to make of its built forms, its particular social relations, and its specific political economy? Since the early 1970s, an important part of the answer to what Manuel Castells once called the “urban question” has been to understand the modern city in terms of its spatial dimension. Inspired by the works of Castells, Lefebvre, Jameson, Eldon, and others, scholars in urban studies, geography, sociology, and politics have developed detailed analyses of the spatial constitution of the urban, often in relationship to the process of capitalist modernization and—particularly in the case of Lefebvre—in relationship to the practices of everyday life. Geographies of differentiation, scalar politics, relationships between abstract urban space and the materiality of bodies: these and other spatial themes have exercised significant influence on studies of urban centres.

Less well understood, however, is the way the modern city was produced in relationship to colonization, and particularly in the encounter between settlers and Indigenous peoples in the urban spaces of settler societies. The city of Los Angeles serves as an exemplar of this tendency to misread the city in settler societies, as it has been the site of extended and now canonical analyses by some of the most important theorists of urban spatiality. Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies*, Davis’ *The City of Quartz*, and Jameson’s analysis of the Bonaventure Hotel in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, all considered in detail the spatial forms of Los Angeles and all three focused on the exclusions and dispossessions inherent in capitalist modernization. And yet, not one of these major works devotes more than a paragraph to the fact that the primary material and spatial reality in the building of Los Angeles was the dispossession and marginalization of Indigenous nations. When colonization is mentioned, it is only in the context of the Third World and its colonization by the First: it is as if the authors have internalized the “salt water test” adopted by the winning European powers after the Second World War. Colonization in these readings occurs everywhere but in the New World.

So it is welcome, indeed, to read Penelope Edmonds’s recent book, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th-Century Pacific Rim Cities*, which makes describing how cities in settler societies are spatially marked by their historical engagement with Indigenous peoples, and their location on Indigenous territory, its central concern. In doing so, *Urbanizing Frontiers* is a contribution not only to studies of empire but also to an emerging scholarship on the relationship between Indigenous peoples and urban centres.

At its heart, Edmonds’ analysis is an attempt to map out how the modern settler society city, and indeed, colonial modernity in general, is a product of its interactions with

(and violent displacement of) Indigenous communities. It is in the space of the urban, Edmonds insists, that settler modernity was forged and not in the frontier, which has been interpreted to be located in rural areas, in the periphery, and away from sites of dense European settlement. Edmonds writes that we “cannot exclude cities when we think of the settler colonization project” (238), and that to think about cities is to think about space. At its core, her argument is that colonization should occupy a central place in discussions of the spatial forms of urban centres in the New World, and that the urban should play a central role in discussions of the colonization of Indigenous nations.

*Urbanizing Frontiers* is a work of history, and Edmonds makes her argument through comparing the histories of two Pacific Rim cities: Melbourne, in the State of Victoria, Australia, and Victoria, British Columbia. While her method is historical, Edmonds argues that the city of the present cannot be seen as discontinuous from its history. The settler society city of today is deeply marked by its racialized spatiality, its historical location in the broader currents of empire, and its ongoing, complex, and often violent transactions with Indigenous peoples, with all the anxieties, displacements, and ambivalences that attend that relationship.

The book is organized into a series of chapters that largely alternate between Melbourne and Victoria, although Melbourne receives more extended treatment than Victoria—perhaps a reflection of the the author’s current location at the University of Melbourne. The chapters are roughly chronological but focus on a relatively narrow time period, as the last five of the book’s eight chapters deal with the period 1843–1871. Notwithstanding the narrowness of the time period, Edmonds makes an effort to indicate how the processes she charts changed over time, noting that in Victoria, for instance, a more informal and fluid initial interaction and spatialization gave way to a more bureaucratic and structured racial segregation, deepening and formalizing the moral geography of the settler city.

While *Urbanizing Frontiers* is an innovative attempt to expand the scope of colonial and settler society studies into the new territory of the urban, Edmonds approaches this task using the conventional methods of the historian. Her primary data is drawn from city records, police files, memoirs, newspaper accounts, official correspondence, written records from colonial administrators, and government archives, and she uses these to narrate developments over time in her two research sites. It is important to note here what Edmonds is *not* doing: she is not attempting to relay the experience or perspectives of the Indigenous people who are the subject of the book, and cites both the lack of source material produced from an Indigenous perspective and her status as a non-Aboriginal scholar as her reasons. Rather, she has envisioned the book as a project of “historical reclamation” with a focus on how the everyday lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people were transformed in the context of colonization and urbanization at the edges of empire. This last point is important: *Urbanizing Frontiers* is by no means a local history. Edmonds firmly locates Melbourne and Victoria in larger, trans-global circuits of imperial commerce and the imperial centre’s attempt to articulate Anglo-Saxon cultural forms in its colonies. Despite their claims to uniqueness, Melbourne and Victoria should both be seen as products of their (often liminal) place in the British Empire, even as Edmonds points to the different ways in which empire, “Englishness,” and race relations were worked out in the local context.

The towns of Victoria and of Melbourne were, thus, crucial spaces in which the imperial project was elaborated in the colonies. They were “formative sites” for the construction of settler society modernity, and that construction actively involved Indigenous peoples, both as subjects of colonial rule but also as agents in their own rights. In this the streetscapes of Melbourne and Victoria were what Mary Louise Pratt called “contact zones”: dynamic spaces for working out the relationship between settler society and Indigenous peoples, and for articulating the self-image of the Empire; spaces that were ultimately organized around the interests of settler society and in which Indigenous people were assigned increasingly marginal roles. Those dynamics configured the current spatial dimensions of the city, and continue to be worked out today in the ongoing processes of colonization.

The book encompasses a range of theoretical inspirations. Most centrally, Edmonds draws from the spatial theorizations of Lefebvre in her emphasis on the “production of urban space” in the two cities, but the analysis is also clearly inspired by literatures on the contact zone. Writings from postcolonial theorists (Bhabha, Chakrabarty, and Stoler), whiteness studies (Harris), and theorists of the body (Butler, Grosz) have influenced her in her attempts to describe how the twin projects of colonization and urbanization operated to radically transform and reconfigure the distribution of bodies in the streetscapes of Victoria and Melbourne, as well as race relations within and without the intimate sphere. There is a marked influence of gender studies in *Urbanizing Frontiers*: in addition to a dedicated chapter on gender and segregation, there are numerous discussions of the differential impact of colonization on Indigenous women’s bodies, and the specific ways in which female bodies and female sexuality were sites of anxiety and of desire for the colonizing gaze. These orientations are, in turn, influenced by the tradition (presumably also derived from Lefebvre) of analyzing everyday life as a formative site of social relations.

These different strands are often combined in productive ways. For instance, Edmonds deploys notions of hybridity and a postcolonial analysis to draw attention to the “mixed” nature of the population of the two cities, and to the ways in which the Indigenous population influenced the identity and makeup of the cities and its non-Indigenous inhabitants. In her analysis, Indigenous people and settler society impacted each other, and she makes efforts to show how Indigenous people represented the anxieties and preoccupations of settler society but also impacted the project of constructing a replica of the metropole in the colony. Here Edmonds usefully combines a gender analysis with postcolonial emphasis on hybridity, demonstrating that the hetero-normativity that imperial centres imagined for the colonies did not appear as planned. This was particularly true in Victoria, with the result that the urban spaces were mixed, both by the need for Indigenous labour and the need for men to find female partners. As such, Edmond’s analysis reveals the urban settler city to be the product of a dialectical, rather than a linear, process, producing a range of combinations and recombinations of social forces, and influenced centrally by race but also by gender.

Despite these influences, this is not a work of political theory: the bulk of the text is given over to detailed historical discussions of particular processes, events, and people in the two cities being examined, and the bibliography is dominated by historians of empire, local histories, and source documents.

Overall, this is a detailed and well-researched book that gives a solid picture of how settler colonization was articulated on the ground, with spatial, social, and political effects that can be identified today. And, in expanding the scope of studies of settler colonization to include the urban, Edmonds has contributed to the development of the field in ways that go beyond the specifics of her research project.

Having said this, the book is not without its limitations. Theoretically informed readers, or those looking for the broader implications of the specific claims Edmonds makes, will have to do some of the work themselves, as some of her more interesting claims are performed or asserted more than they are worked out. For instance, while she suggests that her two research sites enable us to see the contours of settler society modernity ("I opened a window on the broad macro-historical processes of British colonialism on the Pacific Rim," she writes), we are left to extrapolate this from the data provided. The "then" and the "now" of the two cities are never completely integrated in her account, despite the promise that they are inseparable, leaving the reader to bridge the gap. A similar problem confronts the "here" and "there" of the local and transglobal. Put another way, the book is only partially successful in helping us make the move from the city as an object of inquiry (its streetscape, its local history, the particular skirmishes and maneuvers that occurred in its streets, bridges, and alleys) to the urban as a mediating form of imperial power. In this respect, the book will be of interest to scholars of the British Empire, local historians, and students of urban development, but less so to political scientists, scholars of modernity and post-modernity in general, and others who may be looking for more extended discussion of racialized space in modern colonial urbanity.

As well, the text leaves the reader with little sense of how Indigenous people would experience the city today. While Edmonds corrects an serious imbalance in the literature in pointing out the role of urban spaces in colonizing processes, she repeats the mistake of seeing Indigenous people in urban centres largely as marginalized, leaving little room for an exploration of how Indigenous peoples created Indigenous space in urban centres, subtly but effectively recapturing colonized space for Indigenous purposes. Finally, Edmonds does a good job of describing how Indigenous people were marginalized through a series of spatial strategies, but in her concern to show how settler society created this landscape, she ignores a second core strategy of settler capitalism: the appropriation, and then commodification, of Indigenous identities and material practices. Absent such an analysis, she is unable to explain how the current racial geography of Victoria, for instance, is as much about retail sites selling Indian arts and crafts as it is about the land claims of Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations.

On a more minor note, the narrative flow is often dense with detail and the argument is not always clear, leaving those who are not interested in the details with the challenge of identifying the relationship between the data and the general arguments.

Overall, though, *Colonizing Frontiers* is a welcome addition to the literature on urban studies, colonization, and empire studies. With luck, it will stimulate more analysis of the relationship between Indigenous people and urban centres, and encourage a more nuanced understanding of multiple modes of settler modernity.