What is planning without property? Relational practices of being and belonging

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Abstract
What is planning without property? This question was recently posed to me following a conference presentation. In this paper, I argue that taking this question seriously reveals unchallenged assumptions about the relationship between planning and property. Focusing on Canada as a settler colonial liberal democracy, I respond to this question by looking at the Indian Act which has supported colonial dispossession and assimilation in Canada for almost 200 years and rely on Brenna Bhandar’s conceptualization of “racial regimes of property” as a means of examining how racial subjects and private property are co-produced. I then look to the practices reflected in the creation of Nadia Myre’s artwork Indian Act to show how Indigenous epistemologies can aid in the conceptualization of planning without property. I argue that planning without property would be an approach to planning that would be focused on identifying, making, and strengthening the human and more-than-human relationships the flourishing of life requires. Thus, planning without property would support practices of being and belonging rather than practices of exclusion and domination.

Keywords
Property, racial capitalism, settler colonialism, planning

Introduction: More of a comment than a question
I have just finished my presentation on the colonial dimensions of planning, arguing that planning’s entanglements with colonialism stem from its preoccupation with property. Like a ball player at bat, I stand waiting for the questions . . . What is planning without property? The question is pitched slowly, easily, in anticipation of the return. Then suddenly, out of left field,
someone else stands and repeats the question. Aggressively, and with some hostility. But what IS PLANNING without PROPERTY!!??

What is planning without property? While I cannot remember the answer I provided, perhaps because the confrontational tone of the second person made me anxious and defensive, I found this to be a provocative and important question, and one I could not fully answer at the time. As an Indigenous (Anishinaabe) scholar of urban planning, I am committed to interrogating how settler colonialism, as a mode of racial capitalism, shapes planning practice. I am also committed to understanding how Indigenous intellectual traditions—including Indigenous environmental knowledge, legal orders, and cultural production—can serve as the foundation for decolonial and emancipatory approaches to planning. As a generative question, “What is planning without property?” forces me to reflect on what these commitments require as well as the tensions that might arise by continuing to frame anti-colonial practices under the rubric of “planning.” On the other hand, as a question that refuses to imagine the possibility of a world without racism, or planning without property, it is a bitter pill to swallow. As scholars, the questions that consume us reflect our intellectual interests and shape our work. More importantly, the questions we choose to engage with signal our political commitments. Given the multiple ideological investments this question suggests, it is a question that has preoccupied me since it was posed.

The question “What is planning without property?” can be understood in two registers, each premised on a distinct set of commitments and assumptions. On the one hand, as a friendly provocation, this question can be understood as an inquiry into the possibilities for approaches to planning beyond the racist and capitalist social order that currently shapes planning. On the other hand, as a “gotcha” question, it implies that the idea of planning without property is unthinkable. As a question in response to a non-sensical proposition, it assumes that planning and property are so deeply enmeshed that it is impossible to imagine one without the other. It implies a commitment not only to planning, but to the racist social order which shapes planning’s mainstream practices.

What is planning without property? In this paper, I respond to this question in its two registers, focusing on Canada as a settler colonial liberal democracy. Focusing on mainstream planning processes in Canada, I argue that taking this question seriously reveals unchallenged assumptions about the relationship between planning and property and the ways the assumptions embedded in the racial property regime shape planning. I rely on Brenna Bhandar’s conceptualization of “racial regimes of property” as a means of examining how racial subjects and private property are co-produced (Bhandar, 2018: 8). Applied to planning, Bhandar’s conceptual framework offers one way to make evident how planning reinforces the racial property regime and reproduces racial inequality and oppression.

I place this analysis of the racial property regime within an analysis of settler colonialism and use the concept of conquest alongside theories of settler colonialism. Recognizing the violence at work in processes of racialization, Tiffany Lethabo King (2019) proposes “conquest” as a more apt term for describing the genocidal processes of dehumanization that connect histories of colonialism and transatlantic slavery. In doing so, she nuances definitions of settler-colonialism that focus the acquisition of land to focus on the violent relations that secure processes of dispossession and displacement. She draws attention to the ways that conquest is not simply a “land-centered project” but also a “genocide-centered” project (King, 2019: 69), and emphasizes that genocide and dehumanization are not merely
by-products of settler colonialism, but rather central to its operation. Further, King (2019) argues that

conquest, as well as resistance to conquest, is a living, quotidian, and ever present moment that actors can interact with and interrupt. It is not an event, it is not even a structure, but a milieu or active set of relations that we can push on, move around in, and redo from moment to moment. (p. 40).

King underscores the incomplete nature of the project of conquest, which provides the possibility for its contestation in multiple spheres. Bhandar (2018), similarly argues that the racial property regime “requires continual renewal and reinstatiation” (p. 9), highlighting the force the maintenance of this regime requires as well as the potential for its unmaking.

I begin by tracing how the management of property shapes planning and discuss the ways that planning aids in the co-production of race and property in Canada. I argue that the racial property regime is not only connected to the creation and maintenance of a racial hierarchy but also relies on a political ontology that relies on relations of domination and positions some racialized people as less than human. Following Bhandar’s (2018) argument that the transformation of property requires “radical acts of imagining...how to collectively create the conditions for turning away from property as we know it” (p. 200), I then turn to Indigenous thought and the practices embodied in Nadia Myre’s Indian Act to consider the alternatives to private property offered by Indigenous epistemologies. Myre’s work is an example of “decolonial aesthetic” practice, or the ways in which Indigenous artists use artistic production to enact resurgent practices grounded in Indigenous ontologies (Martineau and Ritskes, 2014: 9). I suggest that this work can aid in the conceptualization of planning without property by demonstrating practices that affirm connections to place and modes of belonging in ways that do not rely on private property. Finally, I return to the question of what it might mean to imagine planning without property and consider the conditions under which this question, in its multiple registers, is made coherent.

Planning propertied landscapes

Property is a central organizing concept for planning. Planning functions by ordering relations between users and uses, organizing them into a coherent landscape. Property helps to delineate the sphere of planning, enabling the determination of land uses according to the principle of “highest and best use” (Blomley, 2017; Wideman, 2021). Planning positions property as an object of planning while also ascribing economic value to that object, often aiming to increase property values through a logic of improvement (Lombardo and Wideman, 2018; (Ranganathan, 2018)). The preservation of private property and the protections of the rights of landowners relies on the disciplinary powers of the state. Planning is thus complicit in the creation and maintenance of a property regime as well as the carceral regime that sustains it (Simpson et al., 2020).

While property is important for planning, the centrality of private property in planning processes is often overlooked, as planners conceptualize land uses as distinct from ownership (Blomley, 2017; Wideman, 2021). Consequently, the ownership model of property, which imagines property as a relation of domination between people and things, remains largely unquestioned in planning scholarship (Blomley, 2017; Krueckeberg, 1995). This
uncritical acceptance of private property gives rise to what Mona Fawaz calls the “property effect” or the assumption that all landscapes are propertied (Fawaz, 2017). This assumption not only masks the political nature of planning but also limits the forms of practice that planners might consider, particularly when it comes to addressing injustice (Fawaz, 2017). Uncritically accepting the private property regime ensures that the world is created “in the image of the ownership model” and limits planning activities to those that are legible within the property grid (Fawaz and Moumtaz, 2017: 346).

More recently, scholars have recognized how the uses of property extend far beyond the ordering of built landscapes. Planning’s commitment to property accounts for planning’s entanglements with colonialism (Porter, 2010) and explains how settler colonialism (Blatman-Thomas and Porter, 2019) and racial capitalism are spatialized as urban processes that render urbanization always anti-Indigenous and always anti-Black (Dorries, et al., 2019; Rutland, 2018). Through state-driven processes that hinge on the reproduction of racial hierarchies, propertied landscapes become intertwined with geographies of criminalization, surveillance, and incarceration (Garcia-Hallett, et al., 2020; Sherman, 2020; Simpson et al., 2020) and contribute to the displacement and dispossession of racialized and economically marginalized communities (Blomley, 2004; Roy, 2003, 2006).

As planning has become more attuned to issues of injustice, planning theorists have promoted justice as the object of progressive planning (Fainstein, 2014; Roy, 2006; Sandercock, 1998; Soja, 2010). With this orientation towards justice, progressive planning is often understood as a departure from modernist and rational comprehensive approaches that prize rational decision-making and treat planning as a technical rather than political process. Progressive planning scholars have advanced crucially important work, drawing attention to the ways that planning participates in racial oppression (Thomas, 1994; Yiftachel, 1998) and emphasize how planning’s euro-centric epistemological framework limits planning’s imagination (Bates et al., 2018; Sandercock, 1998). While recognizing the role that property plays in creating injustice, planners have not identified an alternative to private property (Porter, 2014). Instead, many of the prevailing justice-oriented approaches to planning emphasize how planning procedures might be enhanced to accommodate and include marginalized people. Consequently, the field of planning continues to struggle to fully account for its relationship to racial oppression and to articulate anti-colonial and emancipatory approaches.

Charting how planning is part of the reproduction and retrenchment of white supremacy and racial capitalism, Rashad Williams (2020) argues that planning must be understood as “racial planning.” According to Williams, planning operates through racial exploitation and participates in the production of racial spaces while also ensuring that white people continually inherit a materially advantaged position, thus both producing and perpetuating inequality. He envisions a form of “reparative planning” that “requires fundamental changes in the distribution of public goods and services and...a fundamental rethinking of the role of African American communities in setting planning goals and enacting planning policies” (Williams, 2020: 8). Williams' attention to the racial character of planning reveals the importance of foregrounding analyses of race and racism in theorizing planning practices that might support racial justice. Yet, as Bhandar (2018) cautions, “simply exposing how race is a fabrication” is not sufficient for confronting racism and that one must also uncover the “means by which relations of power and cultural forms coalesce in racial regimes” (p. 14). I suggest that an examination of how planning reinforces this racial property regime and reproduces racial inequality is a crucial step for imagining what planning could be without property.
Racial planning and the racial property regime

Property law and racial subjectivity develop in relation to each other in ways that define “the human” as a category of whiteness (Bhandar, 2018: 4). If the making of the racial property regime supports conquest by defining the category of the human to exclude Indigenous and Black people, then the imagining planning without property requires refusing the racial property regime and the political ontology which supports it. The assumptions upon which the racial property regime relies means that conquest is an “ontological proposition” (Byrd et al., 2018: 3) in addition to a proposition about the nature of property (Nichols, 2018). By marking the targets of genocide, the racial property regime concerns the making of the human (Roy, 2017). The racial property regime is thus instantiated through a process of racial sorting that creates a racial hierarchy while at the same time marking some as unworthy of life. In this way, the racial property regime is enrolled in a genocidal logic.

The ways this genocidal logic supports conquest and settler colonialism is particularly evident in Canada. Bhandar (2018) examines how the creation of the racial property regime relies on multiple techniques and is evident in the legal apparatus that supports ongoing conquest in Canada. Since 1856 and up to today, a racist and sexist legal framework known as the Indian Act has governed all aspects of Indigenous life in Canada (Bhandar, 2018; Lawrence, 2003; Palmater, 2011). One of the enduring goals of the Indian Act has been to naturalize and facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, which it achieves by creating a legal and bureaucratic category—“Indian”—which can then be eliminated through assimilation. In its original form, it also limited the right to own private property to those who did not hold “Indian” status. Today, the Indian Act continues to regulate Indigeneity as a legal status and in so doing also limits community membership and undermines the principles which have customarily formed the basis for community membership and belonging. In short, the Indian Act is the legal foundation of the “logic of elimination” (Wolfe, 2006) that organizes settler colonialism and aids in the acquisition of territory. As a legal instrument, the Indian Act serves to make the category of the “human” legible and governable in ways that reflect an anti-Indigenous vision of the human across multiple spheres of social and political life.

The Indian Act is not only racist but also sexist. Since its inception, the Indian Act has advanced dispossession and assimilation by targeting Indigenous women in the ways Indigenous women are reproduced. In particular, it limits the ability of Indigenous women to be granted both personhood and Indian status (Simpson, 2016). Thus, the production of property is not only closely tied to a racial regime, but also a gendered regime that targets women, making them vulnerable to colonial violence while also justifying the expansion of regimes of policing and incarceration (Dorries and Harjo, 2020). For these reasons, Simpson (2017) argues that dispossession must be conceptualized as more than the loss of land, but as the “gendered removal of our bodies and minds” from the ethical, place-based relations, and obligations that make life possible (p. 43).

Planning inherits and spatializes this racial property regime, relying upon the Indian Act in determining the status of Indigenous peoples and communities within planning processes (Dorries, 2017). Indigenous communities often are excluded from planning processes because “Indians and lands reserved for Indians” are considered a federal responsibility, while planning is a provincial responsibility often delegated to local governments. Indigenous peoples, territories, and interests are consequently rendered illegible within planning processes (Borrows, 1997). In the application of this racist and gendered legal framework, planning identifies the proper subjects of planning to differentially accord access to planning. Moreover, by mobilizing the status identities created by the Indian Act, planning
reaffirms the racial property regime and upholds a system of privilege that accords significant economic and political gains to non-Indigenous peoples while enabling the criminalization of Indigenous expressions of political authority (Dorries, 2017). In Canada, there are numerous examples of the protection of private property being deemed a legally justifiable reason for the killing of Indigenous people (Starblanket and Hunt, 2020). Indeed, policing, surveillance, and the carceral system exist to preserve the state’s monopoly on the creation of property (Walcott, 2021: 27). In the realm of planning, Indigenous expressions of planning and territorial authority have often been criminalized (Borrows, 1997; Dorries, 2017). Planning is connected to this regime of violence, threatening the life of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people through its connections to creation and maintenance of the racial property regime (Simpson et al., 2020).

Recognizing the role that planning has played in colonialism, planning scholars have proposed changes to the statutory planning framework that might increase Indigenous participation and influence in planning processes and facilitate the recognition of Indigenous territorial claims (Porter and Barry, 2016). While planning must confront the injustices that are produced by state-led planning processes, such measures fail to address the racism that informs the statutory planning framework. Moreover, although planning and urban development can be mobilized to secure Indigenous rights to property, expanding access to the property regime may ultimately fail to transform it, as “struggles against dispossession too easily become struggles for possession” (Porter, 2014: 401). Conceptualizing justice through the rubrics of property fails to challenge the racist legal framework as well as the anti-Indigenous and anti-Black assumptions upon which the racial property regime relies.

Justice strategies that focus on securing property rights run the risk of reinvigorating the racial property regime rather than undermining it. As Robert Nichols (2018) argues, in the context of settler colonialism, the concept of possession can only be understood in relation to dispossession. Examining the relationship between the acquisition of land and the creation of property regimes, Nichols (2018) argues that colonization creates property “such that it appears retrospectively to be a form of theft in the ordinary sense” (p. 12). In other words, colonization does not simply concern the acquisition of territory, it also participates in the creation of property itself and possession must be regarded as an effect of dispossession. In the context of settler colonialism, property cannot be separated from the violence of conquest. Consequently, approaches to planning that hinge on improving access to the same racial planning processes implicated in the creation and management of the racial property regime only stand to reinforce those regimes; property will always be an inadequate category for conceptualizing anti-colonial and emancipatory approaches to planning. Instead, as Bhandar writes, dismantling racial regimes of ownership “requires nothing less than a radically different political imaginary of property” premised on the ontologies of property that have been suppressed by colonialism. She looks to the work of Indigenous legal scholars as examples of the modes of thought that will produce the “transformation of the self and our relations with one another that are a precondition for wide social and political transformations” (Bhandar, 2018: 193).

The racial property regime is based on a political ontology which posits the “self-possession subject as the ideal status against which the juridical category of the Indian was legislatively defined.” (Bhandar, 2018: 30). Firmly rooted in the Christian theological-political narrative of creation recounted in Genesis, the theory of possessive individualism names the assumption that property is created by man’s investment of labor in land. As a political ontology, possessive individualism positions the individual as the sole owner of his labor. Through cultivation and improvement, man invests his labor in land. This position of
domination enables the creation of property while also obligating man to “rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds in the sky, and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1:28). This political ontology begins with the agency of humans and their assumed position of dominance in relation to the more-than-human world. This theory of property was elaborated by John Locke and undergirds a political philosophy that inspired many of the ideals of Western liberal democratic rule and is intimately connected to the colonization of the New World (Arneil, 1996). The capacities for self-possession and property ownership required for the creation of property were accorded only to whites, providing justification for colonization and slavery (Harris, 1993). This framework, which positions land and body as discreet and unrelated elements, and which denies the agency of personhood to Black and Indigenous people, is also the foundation for the theory of private property actively reinforced by planning. For instance, the “logic of severability” (Blomley, 2011: 213) that informs the ownership model of property is also reflected in assumption that land uses and land users can be treated as distinct and unrelated elements within a propertied landscape.

Indigenous intellectual traditions offer alternatives to the assumptions upon which the racial property regime relies. Specifically, Indigenous ontologies challenge the worldview that positions people and land as ontologically distinct and instead emphasizes the interconnectedness of the human and the more-than-human world. Indigenous intellectual traditions suggest alternative ways of conceptualizing the relationship between land, body, and community. Drawing on the Anishinaabe creation story, Vanessa Watts explains that within an Anishinaabe cosmology “land is alive and thinking” (Watts, 2013: 21). In contrast to the account of creation provided in Genesis which envisions the creation of property through the investment of human agency in inanimate land, the Anishinaabe creation story explains how humans derive agency from the agency already possessed by land and more-than-human kin. Because humans rely upon these relations for survival, human agency must be regarded as an extension of the agency of the more-than-human world. This framework does not simply value more-than-human beings but rather places these beings at the center of an ethical political ontology. Thus, within an Indigenous cosmology, land is understood as set of life-giving relations rather than as an object of human domination. These relationships give rise to a set of obligations and duties to place that form the basis of Indigenous legal orders (Craft, 2014; Todd, 2018). Anishinaabe scholar Deb McGregor explains how the maintenance of these relations by living in “respectful and reciprocal terms” with the more-than-human world is required for life to flourish and is the cornerstone of living well (McGregor, 2018: 10).

These relations are central to the concept of “grounded normativity” or a land-based system of reciprocal relations and obligations that are the basis for Indigenous life and for anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggle. Far from relying on relations of domination, this system of land-based relations “can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms” and “inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relations with human and non-human others over time” (Coulthard, 2014: 13). Rather than pursuing relations of dominance through regimes of private property, an anti-colonial politics based on grounded normativity seeks to identify and strengthen the practices that allow us to locate ourselves within the web of rationality that makes life possible.

Nadia Myre’s Indian Act: Belonging without property

Debates focusing on the incongruencies between theory and practice have been an enduring feature of planning scholarship (Alexander, 2010). Similarly, progressive planning scholars
have raised questions about the tactics and strategies that might be deployed in the advance-
ment of justice and freedom. Indigenous artistic production is a crucial vessel of both
Indigenous knowledge and practice and can provide an intellectual framework for envision-
ing alternative, anti-colonial forms of planning (Dorries and Harjo, 2020). I have chosen to
focus on Algonquin artist Nadia Myre’s beaded artwork Indian Act (2000–2002)\textsuperscript{2} for the
ways it directly engages the Indian Act as racist legislation foundational to the creation of a
racial property regime in Canada, as well as for the potential this artwork offers in thinking
about other practices of relationality that resist the racist social order imposed by this legal
framework.

Myre’s artwork advances the conceptualization of planning without property by dem-
onstrating practices that affirm connections to place and modes of belonging in ways that do
not rely on private property. As a consequence of the racist and sexist provisions of the
Indian Act, Myre and her mother were forcibly separated from her community. Until 1984,
according to the status provisions of the Indian Act, Indian women who married non-Indian
men automatically lost their status. In this way, the Indian Act promoted both material and
political dispossession: with that loss of status many women also lost the right to live in and
participate in the social and political life of their communities.

Myre’s Indian Act refuses the racist logic of the Act while also demonstrating how its
logics can be remade and replaced through participatory action. Indian Act consists of
56 computer-printed pages containing the entire text of the 1876 legislation. Between
2000 and 2002, Myre enlisted the aid of 230 volunteers to bead over the text of the
Indian Act with white beads, and held collective beading workshops held in several
venues. Working with computer printouts of the Indian Act, the volunteers beaded over
the text, replacing the words with a series of dots and dashes. The blank spaces of the page
were covered by rows of white beads. The beaded pages were mounted on black shroud, an
English cloth commonly traded and used for clothing during the early colonial period.

In addition to making the text illegible, the collective labor invested in the project trans-
formed computer-printed pages of an oppressive piece of legislation into a symbol of the
potential of collective action, literally remaking the form and meaning of the Indian Act. This action undermined the original intent of the text, which was to obliterate customary
governance structures, kinship relations, and political authority by installing a racist and
hetero-patriarchal regime of colonial governance based on racist and sexist private property
regime. The cooperative effort required to complete the work transformed the meaning of
the original text, and configured self-determination as a collective, ongoing process that
refuses the identities and modes of governance prescribed by setter colonial law.

Nadia Myre’s Indian Act (2000–2002) also demonstrates how beading can serve as a
methodology for analyzing and refusing the distinctions between land and body mobilized
in racial regimes of property. Despite attempts to ban the practice, beading is a form of
artistic, cultural, and political expression that has long been important to Indigenous peo-
ples of Turtle Island and remains an expression of both creativity and sovereignty today
(Racette, 2017). Amendments to the Indian Act made in 1884 outlawed activities such as the
potlach, and in 1885 these prohibitions were extended to all forms of ceremony, including
dancing. Consequently, both beading and appearing in beaded regalia were banned, and
those found to participate in these activities or who encouraged such activities were subject
to punishment by imprisonment, which had a direct impact on the practice and status of
beading (Prete, 2019). The criminalization of these practices and signaled “a kind of cultural
death,” as the products of beading were rendered illegal and beaded objects were seized, and
often placed in museums (Racette, 2017).
However, despite attempts to assimilate Indigenous peoples by outlawing cultural and political practices, beading persists as an important practice that not only resurfaces cultural traditions but also confronts ecological and colonial violence. For instance, in her Trading series, Cree artist Ruth Cuthand uses beadwork to address blood-borne and water-borne pathologies such as bubonic plague, measles, and smallpox that Europeans brought to Indigenous communities. Cuthand explains that while glass beads, once traded for furs, are a metaphor for colonization, beading itself is a practice of resistance and regeneration. As Cuthand (2015) puts it, beading is “an activity of survival. It is a means of remembering tradition and feeling well” (p. 83).

Beadwork also connects people to place. Métis artist Katherine Boyer produces beaded maps to tell stories between identity and place, positioning beadwork as a form of labor that affirms connections between land and body (Robertson, 2017). Drawing on the work of Cuthand and Boyer, Carmen Robertson observes how “the movements of the needle and thread, creation of design, and choices of colour, demand keen performative attention which both quiets and opens the mind” (Robertson, 2017: 15). As an embodied activity, beading activates connections to kin, place, and more than human relations (Harjo et al., 2018). Although it may be less visible than other forms of resistance, beading draws attention to and affirms the relations to land and kin upon which life depends. Moreover, although often classified as a “mere” example of material culture, as a means of artistic and political expression and mode of knowledge transmission, beading offers a methodology for intellectual inquiry activates relations to community and place (Prete, 2019; Ray, 2016).

Beadwork can thus be situated within a broader set of Indigenous aesthetic practices that are both political and artistic. Indigenous aesthetic practices not only parse but also create new forms of relations, and “frame more imaginative, pleasurable, flexible, and often humorous renderings of Native American intellectual and cultural paradigms…” through “individual and community assertions of what sovereignty and self-representation mean” (Raheja, 2015: 29). Such practices engage relations to land, environments, kin, family, and self and evoke the multiple ways—linguistic, embodied, and spiritual—these relations are made and nurtured. “Decolonial aesthetics” take artistic and cultural production as their target, and are much more than a tool for calling out and resisting colonialism but instead suggest a means of creating and imagining futures beyond colonialism which do not center the colonial state, Western knowledge, property, or non-Indigenous peoples as the drivers of decolonization (Martineau and Ritskes, 2014).

Through these collective practices, Myre’s work gestures towards new forms of belonging and suggests the attitudes and practices that are necessary to imagine modes of planning that do not rely on private property. As Leanne Simpson (2017) reminds us, “the opposite of dispossession is not possession, it is deep, reciprocal, consensual attachment” (p. 43). Through collectively deactivating the terms of belonging and identity determined by the Indian Act, Myre’s Indian Act suggests forms of being and belonging that are predicated on mutual recognition and collective effort rather than possession. Myre’s Indian Act both performs and practices a mode of subjectivity that is anti-colonial in its confrontation and subversion of colonial regimes of identity, ownership, and belonging while at the same time making alternatives. Indian Act reshapes Indigenous identity, transforming it from a juridically determined status organized by a racist legal regime to a practice characterized by the making of relations as well as active acts of belonging and care. These acts of care subvert the capitalist and colonialist order bent on the destruction of Indigenous life and reflect practices of making community that mobilize anti-colonial political subjectivities.
Neither the maintenance nor the destruction of the racial property regime is inevitable. Indian Act gestures towards an alternative to the racial property regime that currently organizes planning. Specifically, it suggests that alternative forms of subjectivity that might allow planning to be understood as a tool for the creation of relations to people and place and as a practice that foregrounds modes of being and belonging that do not rely on private property. It short, it highlights how practices that affirm relationality can be enlisted to reject and remake the racist social relations upon which the practices of racial planning are built. There are countless examples of ways Black and Indigenous communities are already enacting alternatives through organizing and resistance (Ramírez, 2020). Myre’s Indian Act is just one of many examples how individuals and communities challenge and refuse the racist and sexist logics of colonialism while also demonstrating how decolonial futures can be enacted in the present.

Conclusion: Calling the question

The ownership model of private property which provides the foundation for mainstream planning as practiced in settler-colonial liberal democracies such as Canada facilitates dispossession and displacement. The racial regime of property that informs racial planning serves the requirements of racial capitalism by creating and reinforcing relations of domination, exclusion, and the commodification and devaluation of life. It imposes a racial hierarchy that results in the accrual of social, economic, and political benefits to whites. As a question that presumes that planning without property is impossible, “what is planning without property?” is a question about preserving planning, property, and the racial injustice the racial property regime produces. It is a question about how to maintain the racist legal frameworks upon which planning relies. It is a question that accepts racism and oppression as inevitable facts of life. It is a question that begs for the inheritances of property. It is a question invested in whiteness.

Planning without property would be an approach to planning that would dispense with the assumptions upon which the ownership model of private property is founded. As a set of practices, this mode of planning would be focused on identifying, making, and strengthening the human and more-than-human relationships the flourishing of life requires. Planning without property would support practices of being and belonging rather than practices of exclusion and domination. An interrogation of the ways the racial property regime is replicated and reinforced by planning reveals that this regime, while firmly entrenched in current planning practices, is not inevitable. In this context, the question “what is planning without property?” is a hopeful question. It is a question about the strategies that might be employed to find alternatives to the racist social order and the strategies that might abolish this order.

Finally, in answering this question, I want to add one final note of caution. In both registers, this question runs the risk of focusing on what Tuck and Yang (2012) call “settler normalcy” and is also evident in questions such as “What will decolonization look like? What will happen after abolition?” (Tuck and Yang, 2012: 35). These questions betray a preoccupation with maintaining the benefits that accrue to whites through racial injustice. Such a preoccupation makes it more difficult to imagine alternatives that do not replicate the status quo. As an alternative, I suggest that in addition to asking “what is planning without property?,” the interests of justice would be best served by questions that ask us to imagine the forms of praxis and modes of relationality that will best support the ethical flourishing of life. Questions concerning the creation of the conditions for free and ethical modes of life are questions that pre-empt discussions about the impossibility of planning...
without property. Such questions point towards the necessity of abolishing the racial property regime and urge us toward decolonial and emancipatory praxis.

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Notes
1. I use the term Indigenous to refer to the various sovereign peoples who have inhabited Turtle Island since time immemorial. This word is capitalized in the same manner that words such as “European” and “American” are capitalized. I use the terms “Aboriginal,” “Indian,” and “First Nations” when discussing specific legal categorizations defined by Canadian law.
2. https://www.nadiamyre.net/social-practices-and-community-engagement#/indian-act-project/
3. https://www.ruthcuthand.ca/trading-series/

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