

‘They don’t let us look after each other like we used to’: reframing Indigenous homeless geographies as home/journeying in the Northwest Territories, Canada

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Introduction

Another event that Ayah predicted was that the Dene way of life would change. Some kind of power would come from somewhere and people would listen to it. Their lifestyle would change and they would be affected by the change. “I see that in the future,” said Ayah. “Whatever you do, do not change your lifestyle. If you do, you will be sorry later.” He said that to the people, but the people did not listen.

In 1940, the federal government started to develop the Northwest Territories. They began to improve government services in the North by introducing education, health care and welfare. These services really altered the Dene way of life. Dene children learned to speak English and there was a change in languages spoken by the children. Kids did not listen to their parents anymore. Adults spent less time trapping and hunting. Pretty soon, nobody used the land anymore.

- George Blondin, “The Making of a Prophet When the World Was New”

Change is a constant thread woven throughout considerations of contemporary Indigenous life in Canada. Researchers in particular tend to be preoccupied with the concept of change and the ways in which it affects Indigenous cultures, livelihoods, and health. It is true that the scope and scale of change that Indigenous peoples have experienced as a result of colonialism and paternalism are unprecedented, and continue to have profound and far-reaching impacts on families and communities through the dynamics of intergenerational transmission. As George Blondin, the late Dene storyteller and respected Elder, describes above, one of the most powerful drivers of change for Indigenous peoples in the Canadian North was accomplished in large part through the extension of the Canadian Welfare State into the Canadian North in the mid-20th century.

In the Canadian North, the introduction of the Canadian Welfare State transformed the Indigenous-State relationship beyond the economic exchange and laissez-faire attitude that characterized the fur trade to one that actively sought to assimilate northern Indigenous people and Canadian modes of citizenship by *changing* Indigenous homes. This was accomplished through policies that moved Indigenous peoples off the land and into settlements, separated children from their families, and enforced the adoption of Euro-Canadian cultural and societal norms through social policy and strategic modes of penalization. The settlements also became distribution points for medical care, income support, and government-provided housing (Condon 1990; Tester and Kulchyski 1994; Damas 2002). Altogether, the introduction of the welfare state to northern Canada brought about swift and wide-reaching social and cultural change, and deliberating altered northern Indigenous peoples ways of life. It also resulted in increased vulnerability for northern Indigenous peoples by fixing a relationship of dependency on the state for shelter, health care, and income support (Tester and Kulchyski 1994; CMHC 1997; Tester 2006). The result, according to Alfred (2009: 42), has been the entrenchment of Indigenous people in colonial societies as “dependencies, in physical, psychological and financial terms, on the very people and institutions that have caused the near erasure of our existence and who have come to dominate us.”

The Canadian Welfare State established a relationship between Indigenous peoples and the state that can be understood as one of welfare colonialism. As a concept, welfare colonialism was first articulated by Paine (1977) to describe the uneven political and economic landscape for Indigenous peoples in the Canadian North. Since then, the term has been taken up more widely to describe the policies and practices through which

liberal democratic (settler) governments both *recognize* the citizenship of Indigenous peoples vis-à-vis access to welfare benefits, and at the same time effectively *deny* their citizenship by nurturing unequal relationships of dependency (Tyler 1993). As Paine (1977: 43) writes:

Any decision taken by the colonizers has a basic flaw: a decision made for the material benefit of the colonized at the same time can be construed as disadvantaging them; a “generous” or “sensible” decision can at the same time be morally “wrong.” This is because it is the colonizers who make the decisions that control the future of the colonized; because the decisions are made (ambiguously) on behalf of the colonized, and yet in the name of the colonizers’ culture (and to her administrative, political, and economic priorities).

Colonial geographies are resisted and altered in many deliberate ways by the very people they attempt to oppress. Resistance to welfare colonialism can be found in the many examples of “home/journeying” (Mallett 2004), revealed through the pathways to home and homelessness described in this chapter. These examples demonstrate the myriad ways in which the meaning, and pursuit, of home extends beyond shelter to include family, spirituality and cultural connections. Therefore, we argue in this chapter that Indigenous homelessness in Canada can be traced directly to the dynamics of welfare colonialism, and to the relationships of dependency that result. These relationships of dependency exist not only at the personal or individual scale, but also have consequences in terms of collective experiences of Indigenous homelessness (see Christensen 2013), or “spiritual homelessness” (Keys Young 1998). The central tension between northern Indigenous sociocultural values and needs, the dominant (neoliberal, Euro-Canadian) societal norms imposed through northern social policy, and the failure of such policy to meaningfully and effectively address Indigenous values and needs, is a shared narrative throughout the life experiences of homeless Indigenous men and women in the Canadian

North. In many ways, Indigenous homelessness is the outcome of a self-fulfilling prophecy, set into motion when the first federal agents arrived to the North and saw Indigenous lives as deficient and disorderly (see De Leeuw et al. 2010). This prophecy is perpetuated today as experiences of Indigenous homelessness are complicated by a clash in values, and a refusal on the part of state-sponsored social policy to recognize and support home/journeying.

Background

Visible, or literal, homelessness has been a significant social concern in the Canada's Northwest Territories since the late 1990s, particularly in the territorial capital, the city of Yellowknife, as well as the town of Inuvik. Yellowknife and Inuvik are the two key administrative, transportation, and economic development centres of the territory (see Map 1). In both communities, the emerging population of visibly homeless northerners is disproportionately Indigenous, with estimates that 90–95 percent of the visible homeless population is Dene, Inuit, or Métis (Christensen 2011).

Public housing in the NWT is administered through 23 local housing organizations (LHOs), each of which is accountable to the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation (NWTHC), a branch of the territorial government. In Inuvik and Yellowknife, the LHOs are known as Housing Authorities. The NWTHC serves the entire population of the NWT, whether Indigenous and non-Indigenous. It also receives substantial funding from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). The NWT has no 'on-reserve housing' administered by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). This is a significant distinction because federal initiatives that fund

Indigenous housing tend to be geared towards Indigenous people living on-reserve, leaving northern Indigenous people out of federal Indigenous housing initiatives. Instead, housing for northern housing initiatives tends to be provided through special pockets of funding established on a case-by-case basis.

The high cost of housing, and the inadequate housing supply, in the Canadian North is contrasted by the decrease in government funding for housing over the past two decades. In 1993, the federal government froze new spending on social housing and stopped its off-reserve, Indigenous-specific housing assistance and has been gradually fading out funding for public housing maintenance since 2004. With the exception of some locally-funded projects, little if any new Indigenous-specific social housing has been built for on-reserve Indigenous households since 1993. However, ‘off-reserve’ northern Indigenous people in the NWT continue to receive some assistance through the general NWT HC programs.

Access to public housing is complicated by chronic housing shortage, high construction costs, and high rates of “core housing need”ⁱ in the vast majority of settlement communities. In an effort to address the prevalence of core housing need across the three northern territories, the federal government allocated \$300 million for northern public housing in 2006. Of this, the Northwest Territories received \$50 million, which was matched by the territorial government under its Affordable Housing Initiative (NWT HC 2009). However, as Falvo (2011) points out, these funds did not result in an increase in the number of public housing units and were instead used to increase the number of homeownership units as well as replace aging public housing stock.

For twenty-nine of the thirty-three communities in the Northwest Territories, public

housing makes up the majority of housing stock. However, in Yellowknife, Inuvik and the three other ‘market’ communities, the housing stock is more diverse. In Yellowknife and Inuvik especially, much of the housing is either privately rented or owned. Public housing, meanwhile, is diminishing in supply in both locales. The limited number of public housing units is especially dire for single adults: the public housing stock in both communities is largely comprised of family-sized units, and what units do exist for singles are prioritized for adults over 60 or for those with disabilities (Falvo 2011).

This chapter results from a combination of in-depth ethnographic research, mutual experience and learning, conversation and friendship. Julia is a non-Indigenous scholar, born and raised in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. This chapter is grounded primarily in the more than seven years of ethnographic research she has conducted on geographies of Indigenous home and homelessness in the Northwest Territories, Canada. This research was accomplished through a collaborative, community-based research processⁱⁱ with Indigenous governments, NGOs and homeless men and women in the communities of Inuvik and Yellowknife.

Paul is Tulita Dene, born and raised in the Sahtu region of the Northwest Territories, with a long career in community leadership, broadcasting, storytelling, and writing. He is frequently called upon to offer his experience, knowledge, mentorship and understanding to a variety of key northern and Indigenous issues. He most recently chaired the Northwest Territories Minister’s Forum on Addictions and Community Wellness, the dynamics of which are incredibly relevant to the understanding of northern Indigenous homelessness we articulate here. The analysis in this chapter is informed by the knowledge Paul has gathered through his own personal life experiences, the years he

has spent as a young child and adult on the land, learning from Elders, and speaking with northerners across the territory about the issues the matter to them as a reporter with CBC North for over 30 years.



Map 1: Northwest Territories with Inuvik and Yellowknife highlighted. 1:9,000,000. [Base data from Statistics Canada. Using ArcMap (GIS software). Version 9.3.1. Redlands, CA: Environmental Systems Research Institute, 1992-2010. Compiled by L. Eades for the author].

In this chapter, we (Julia and Paul) examine the intersections between Indigenous homelessness, welfare colonialism, and contemporary northern social policy. We are especially interested in the role of northern social policy in (re)producing Indigenous homeless geographies, both individually and collectively. Building on a multi-

dimensional understanding of Indigenous home and homelessness (see Christensen 2013), we take up both Keys Young's (1998) concept of "spiritual homelessness" and Mallett's (2004) concept of "home/journeying" in our reading of the scale and scope of homelessness among northern Indigenous people, and the role of northern social policy in (re)producing these geographies. In particular, we argue that many pathways to homelessness comprise efforts at home/journeying and are demonstrative of the ways in which these efforts come into direct conflict with northern social policy. The condition of literal homelessness, then, can be understood as the result of a clash between Indigenous cultural values and dominant social policy paradigms. Through our explorations in this chapter, we also seek to expand the definition of spiritual homelessness to include conflicts in cultural values and social policy paradigms.

Drawing on personal narratives of homelessness, we explore several key areas of policy-home/journeying conflict in the context of the Canadian North. In particular, the complex intersections between public housing policy, child welfare, intergenerational trauma, and dependency present critical gaps in support for northern Indigenous men and women seeking to exit homelessness and in many ways undermine culturally rooted community- and family-based supports. We examine this conflict in values, and the ways in which narratives of home/journeying arise in response.

Moreover, we consider how home/journeying can be supported through social policy. In this vein, we also consider recent developments in the Northwest Territories to better respond to community health needs through the provision of wellness-oriented services that reflect Indigenous values. One of the principal needs highlighted through the Northwest Territories Minister's Forum for Addictions and Community Wellness was for

community-based, on-the-land mental health and addictions programming, an outcome that we argue speaks to the need for community-scale supports in combination with individual-scale interventions. While the outcomes of the Northwest Territories Minister's Forum on Addictions and Community Wellness are a significant step towards embracing Indigenous cultural frameworks in northern healthcare, there is a profound and urgent need for similar transformations in other areas of care such as housing, income support, child and family services, and the criminal justice system, all of which feature strongly in individual pathways to homelessness. In other words, to meaningfully address Indigenous homelessness across settler societies, decolonizing agendas must be adopted to reorient social policy interventions away from the management of perceived 'deficiencies' or 'deviance' (see De Leeuw et al. 2010) towards culturally-relevant, community- and family-based programming focused on supports for home-building.

Geographies of Indigenous home and homelessness

The call for a greater recognition of "home as place" (see May 2000b) in cultural geography implies an emotional, spiritual, or psychological attachment to place as intrinsic to a sense of home. The cultural dimensions of home then play a significant role in determining the contextual meaning and significance of homelessness (Mallett 2004). For not only northern Indigenous cultures, but for Indigenous cultures across Canada, land and family are inextricable from 'home'. Moreover, 'family' extends beyond the nuclear unit to include all members of a community.

However, this sense of home was not understood by the early government agents who came to the Canadian North to bring health care and housing to the people who lived

there. Instead, they saw poverty and aimlessness. In the context of Indigenous communities in Canada, external forces have, in the name of colonialism and also national paternalistic interests, served to uproot Indigenous place, both through the dispossession of land and territory as well as through displacement from family and culture (see Easthope 2004). The result has been the widespread destruction of Indigenous homes and has rendered many Indigenous peoples “homeless in their own lands” (Baskin 2007: 33).

Many scholars, including those in this volume, argue that Indigenous homelessness in settler colonial societies must be situated within the larger context of colonialism (Cedar Project Partnership et al. 2008; Christensen 2013; Peters and Robillard 2009). Furthermore, the United Native Nations Society of British Columbia argues that a meaningful understanding of Indigenous homelessness must also include “those who have suffered from the effects of colonization and whose social, economic, and political conditions have placed them in a disadvantaged position” (UNNS 2001: 20). Geisler and George (2006) echo this broad and comprehensive approach, referring to the myriad colonial interventions experienced by Indigenous people collectively as “the other homelessness.” In their view, Indigenous homelessness “is not an either-or binary of shelter versus no shelter. Such reductionism confuses housing with home and thereby glosses over cultural, spiritual, and ideational meanings of ‘home’ as a secure place to be” (ibid 2006: 26).

This same profound and deep-seated displacement is found at the heart of the concept “spiritual homelessness” (Keys Young 1998), a state of being that “encompasses a broad range of situations and experiences, including physical, spiritual and cultural

dimensions” (ibid 1998: 25). Keys Young (1998) argue that Indigenous peoples’ experiences of homelessness cannot be extracted from the historical experiences of Indigenous people and are therefore qualitatively distinct. Elsewhere, Christensen (2013) has taken up the concept of spiritual homelessness in her conceptualization of Indigenous homelessness as multi-dimensional and multi-scalar. The individual experiences of homeless Indigenous men and women cannot therefore be considered apart from collective experiences of colonialism, paternalism, and intergenerational impacts of trauma (Christensen 2013).

Though intergenerational trauma is a persistent thread in the discourse around Indigenous health and homelessness in Canada, the general literature on homelessness in the Global North highlights *individual* trauma as playing a critical role in shaping homeless experiences across rural and urban settings (Kim and Ford 2006; Robinson 2005; Stewart et al. 2004; Taylor and Sharpe 2008). However, to understand the complexities of Indigenous homelessness, a focus on strictly *individual* traumas does not suffice (Kirmayer, Brass and Tait 2000), for individual traumas implicated in Indigenous homeless experiences are inextricably linked to collective experiences of colonization (Belanger et al. 2013; Cedar Project Partnership et al. 2008) and the cumulative impact of government policies on Indigenous peoples (Menzies 2009; Thurston and Mason 2010).

The causes of intergenerational trauma among Indigenous people are not situated solely in the past. Colonial continuities “[spill] over into the present” (Warry 1998: 84) as evidenced by the persistent health, economic, political and social inequalities experienced by Indigenous peoples. Canadian social policy has served to eradicate “value systems that

existed for thousands of years, replacing them with doctrines that continue to disrupt life for Aboriginal peoples and creating a legacy of trauma” (Menzies 2009: 2).

One example of the reproduction of intergenerational trauma can be found in the disruption of Indigenous families. Each era of post-contact Indigenous history in Canada has introduced new policies that have resulted in the removal of Indigenous children from their homes, be it residential schools, foster care and group homes, or non-Indigenous adoptive families (Fournier and Crey 1997). Today, there are more Indigenous children in the Canadian child welfare system than there ever were at the height of the residential school system (CBC 2011). The factors driving the institutionalization of Indigenous children in the child welfare system are testament to the profound degree of structural violence on Indigenous children and the persistent failure on the part of the state to meaningfully and productively care for Indigenous family and community needs. They also speak to the high rates of family violence and child abuse in many Indigenous communities, conditions that are widely linked to the intergenerational impacts of colonialism (Fournier and Crey 1997; Warry 1998). Many Indigenous children in Canada are effectively rendered homeless at an early age by these conditions, the child welfare system, or often both (Menzies 2009).

The prevalence and (re)production of intergenerational trauma is one reason why colonialism persists as a significant social determinant of Indigenous health (Czyzewski 2011). As a social determinant of health (see, colonialism provides the context within which other determinants—for example, poverty, violence, education—are constructed and interconnected. Intergenerational trauma also continues to play an enormous role in the homelessness pathways of homeless Indigenous men and women (Menzies 2009;

Wente 2000). In the Canadian North, the history of colonization has additional effects on Indigenous homelessness by shaping geographies of economic and social disparity between economic (urban) centres and Indigenous (rural, remote, segregated) communities (Christensen 2012). Thus, the dynamics of welfare colonialism have both social and spatial outcomes, both of which guide individual homeless experiences.

Narratives of home/journeying in pathways to homelessness

The central tension produced through welfare colonialism and its management of homelessness is produced and reproduced through a resistance to “home/journeying” (Mallett 2004). “Home/journeying” denotes the mobile, dynamic nature of home as “a place of origin (however recent or relative) as well as a point of destination” (ibid 2004: 77). Drawing on other scholars like Ahmed (1999), Massey (1992) and hooks (1990), Mallett (2004: 79) suggests that:

Home is not necessarily a singular place or state of being rather it may be one’s country, city or town, where one’s family lives or comes from and/or where one usually lives. It may be other places or relationships. These homes hold differing symbolic meaning and salience. It is possible to be homeless in one, some or all of these categories at the same time. This view resonates with Mary Douglas (1991) view of home as a ‘kind of space’ or ‘localizable idea’. ‘Home is located in space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space . . . home starts by bringing some space under control’ (289). It cannot be simply equated with shelter, house or household.

The concept of “home/journeying” (Mallett 2004) offers a productive and meaningful way towards recognizing many of important acts of agency that may otherwise be ‘lumped together’ into contributing factors to homelessness, for example rural-urban migration to leave a violent relationship, or tent camping in order to gain a sense of independence from the rules of a homeless shelter. Attending to examples of home/journeying allows for the identification of areas for policy and program

interventions to support the alleviation of homelessness. Moreover, the inclusion of home/journeying in our conceptualization of homeless pathways casts the view forward as we seek to find ways to support homeless people as they transition into homed lives.

Throughout this research, homeless Indigenous men and women living in the Northwest Territories described their personal experiences with homelessnessⁱⁱⁱ. Several Indigenous support providers had themselves been homeless previously and were therefore able to reflect on their pathways out of the homelessness and the factors that supported their journey. In the following sections, we share some of these personal accounts and highlight the home/journeying strategies conveyed within them. The particular stories shared here were selected because they each represent a journey or experience commonly shared by other research participants. However, in order to illustrate the multidimensional nature of these personal experiences, and also to demonstrate the ways in which home/journeying efforts come into conflict with policy in many different ways across time and space, it is important to provide significant detail while still maintaining the anonymity of individual research participants. For this reason, all identifying features are changed in order to protect participant confidentiality.

Public housing provision

There are several key areas of northern social policy and programming that clash with the home-building efforts of northern families and, in so doing, directly contribute to individual pathways to homelessness. One such area is the regulation and surveillance of public housing provision. In response to decreasing supply of public housing, and growing demand in northern urbanizing centres, local Housing Authorities have

implemented increasingly strict policies around tenancy and rental arrears. One such policy concerns the length of time in which adult guests may stay with friends or family who live in public housing. In both Inuvik and Yellowknife, an unofficial limit of two weeks is imposed on adult guests.

A government administrator working in public housing emphasized that the two-week time limit on adult guests is largely an effort to cut down on the number of people living in a unit who can afford to contribute to the rent (either through employment or income support) but who do not, which then places the rental burden on those tenants whose names are on the lease. The two-week limit is also in place to ensure that no one with arrears or an otherwise poor record with the NWT HC is staying in a public housing unit. An individual who is not paying their arrears or who has a poor housing record is ineligible to have his/her name on the lease. In fact, these offences usually result in an eviction of that person well before the two-week limit has passed.

Housing Authority representatives in both study communities emphasized time and again that above all else, the two-week limit was implemented in order to protect tenants. Administrators offered a number of accounts of single mothers and Elders who had been in situations where a disruptive family member would not leave the housing unit, or refused to contribute financially to the household. One Housing Authority representative spoke of several instances where public housing tenants contacted the Authority to request an eviction notice be sent to the guest in question, because it was not appropriate within the cultural norms of sharing and reciprocity to tell a family member to leave. The Housing Authorities in general expressed a desire to not only protect the housing they provide, but also the tenants. The alternative, they believe, would be to let

the tenant have the guest until problems occurred and the tenant him or herself was evicted. For example, one homeless Elder in Inuvik had been evicted twice from public housing on account of the destructive actions of his adult children. Several homeless women in Yellowknife also described being evicted after allowing violent partners to stay with them in public housing. Their accounts were further complicated by the presence of children and the loss of those children to foster care following eviction.

Though the regulation of public housing is clearly nuanced and complex, it ultimately eliminates a housing option for those who cannot, for any number of reasons, contribute to the rent but also have no other place to stay. For example, a homeless woman in Inuvik had been staying with her sister after she had been evicted from her unit because of domestic violence. She had arrears to pay the Housing Authority and because she could not pay them, was not eligible to be put on her sister's lease. At the same time, she had nowhere else to go. Two men staying at the shelter in Yellowknife described how they had tried to stay with friends in public housing following their release from prison. Without any money, and with arrears they had accrued in housing prior to their incarceration, they were told to leave by the Housing Authority.

Indeed, there are examples of the ways in which this policy can help a family in public housing. Some public housing tenants described times when a family member wanted to stay, but their presence was deemed undesirable due to substance abuse, violence, or simply because they were a drain on precious household resources. In these cases, a notice from the Housing Authority was welcomed because it provided the institutional muscle necessary to ask a family member to leave, especially where cultural norms of reciprocity and sharing dictate that one should look after a family member in

need. Housing Authority staff also described instances where they would receive a call from a tenant requesting a notice in advance of two weeks so that they could ask their guest to leave.

However, there were far more examples of the ways in which this policy is applied in cases where public housing tenants want to provide shelter to a family member or friend for longer than two weeks, and where having their name put onto the lease is not possible due to life crises, unemployment or outstanding arrears. Anne's story below is an example of how the two week limit serves to both help a tenant, by forcing the eviction of a violent partner, as well as hurt them and those close to them, by also forcing the eviction of Anne's son.

Anne has been a single mother since she was pregnant with her first child. Her on-and off-again boyfriend, a man she refers to as "my ex-common law" lived with her from time to time, but "when things were good, they were really good; when things were bad, he'd go on a drunk, come home, and beat me up." Anne lived in public housing, and after one too many blow ups from her ex-common law, the Housing Authority in Inuvik brought by a letter telling her she would be evicted if he even came to stay with her again. It was the push she needed to split up with him for good. "I had three kids by then, all under five years old. I couldn't afford to get kicked out of housing. Where else would I go?" Today, Anne doesn't know where her ex is. "He went to jail, I know that," she says. "Then last I heard, he was staying at a shelter in Edmonton."

Anne never finished high school, but she was able to pick up work from time to time working in one of the three local hotels doing housekeeping, or working the cash at a local grocery store. After a brief relationship with a new boyfriend, Anne had a fourth

child. Despite working when she could, and being on income support, “it was always a struggle.” When her children were older, Anne started to take classes at Aurora College, working towards her GED. She would like to become an office manager, or an executive assistant.

When Anne’s eldest son reached high school, he was barely attending class. He refused to go, and Anne felt there was little she could do to make him. “He saw his Dad be violent a lot when he was little, so I think he learned to be that way, too. I couldn’t make him do anything, because he would get angry and push us all around.” She was upset and frustrated when he was charged with several break and enters in Inuvik. He ended up at the youth detention centre in Inuvik for several months. When he got out, he told Anne he wanted to move to Yellowknife to live with her sister and have a fresh start. Anne was worried that the big city would be a challenging place for him to be, but nevertheless she arranged with her sister to have him stay with her.

A few weeks after Anne’s son arrived in Yellowknife, he was charged with several break and enters and was once again sentenced to youth detention in the city. By the time he got out, he was almost an adult. He had started drinking when he was in Inuvik, and the problem grew much worse while he was living in Yellowknife. Eventually, he found his way into the detox program at the Salvation Army. The program lasts two weeks, during which time he phoned Anne and asked her to help him get back to Inuvik when he was finished the program. She called around to family and was able to get the money together for airfare. However, just a few days after her son arrived back home, a rental officer from the Inuvik Housing Authority came by to say that her son would have to get his name on the lease and start paying for rent, or they would all be

evicted. Anne tried to argue with the Authority, explaining that her son had just exited a detox program, but they reminded her of the rules on adult guests: two-week maximum stay, or you must have your name on the lease. Anne knew her son wouldn't be able to contribute to the rent, and she couldn't afford to pay for his share. There was nowhere else for him to—all of her extended family members also live in public housing. In the end, Anne's son went to live at the Inuvik homeless shelter. At the time of our interview, he had been there for a week and had started to drink again.

Staying with family or friends for short periods of time offers an important coping strategy for homeless men and women. However, the desire to look after family members in need is hindered by housing policy comes into direct conflict with local cultural values. One woman in Inuvik whose brother had been forced to leave her public housing unit after two weeks complained to me that:

There are so many rules that prevent people from being able to help others or help themselves....People used to live in sod houses, like my grandparents. Nowadays, we think that sounds crazy, like it must have been so tough, but that was home for them. They felt at home and they felt good about themselves because they could care for their families and that was most important. Now there are so many rules that prevent people from being able to look after themselves.

Public housing rules and enforcement policies such as those discussed here also demonstrate how matters of shelter are spaces through which broader social and cultural issues play out. Some families wish to care for family members who may be vulnerable to homelessness. In these cases, this desire conflicts with the limits the Housing Authorities place on adult guests. Ironically, when someone becomes homeless as a result of public housing policy, there appears to be one of two attitudes on the part of policymakers and implementers: first, the naïve expectation that this person will be taken

care of by family who do not live in public housing; or, second, the passive acceptance that this person will simply be homeless. Yet as illustrated here, there are very few supports for families who wish to care for vulnerable adult family members, whether in public or private housing, and therefore the outcome more often than not reflects a passive acceptance of homelessness. The result is then a much broader sense of homelessness through not only a lack of shelter but also through disconnection from family.

Not only do housing policies often clash with important cultural values and family wishes, but the punitive nature of enforcement is an inappropriate response to the trauma that underlies many of the life experiences of northern homeless men and women. Moreover, these enforcement strategies are implemented despite the total lack of alternative shelter options, save emergency shelters, which are only located in Inuvik and Yellowknife. There is therefore a direct and immediate connection between the increasing implementation of such policies and rising literal homelessness in the territory.

Child welfare and the trauma of uprooting

Like public housing policy, the child welfare system also plays a profound and immediate role in individual pathways to homelessness, for both parents and children. For homeless parents, relationships with their children were repeatedly cited as integral to their sense of home. The loss of children to the child welfare system is a deeply traumatic and uprooting experience for parents. Furthermore, many of the young adults who are homeless in the Northwest Territories grew up in and out of the child welfare system, and speak about their separation from family and community, and the reasons underlying that

separation, as early experiences of homelessness and uprooting. The role of the northern child welfare system in the homelessness of young adults has been documented elsewhere (see Christensen 2012, 2013) in addition to the wider literature on Indigenous youth, child welfare and homelessness in Canada (see Baskin 2007; Menzies 2009). However, comparatively little has been written on the homelessness of parents that also relates to the child welfare system.

In the Northwest Territories, foster parents tend to be concentrated in the territorial capital, Yellowknife, which means that many children placed in care are not only separated from their family homes, but also separated from their community entirely. The physical distance only intensifies the sense of uprooting and detachment that occurs as a result of child apprehension. The individual pathways to homelessness of women in this study were almost always bound up within the broader, complicated geographies of the northern child welfare system. For many women like Mona, whose story we introduce below, the apprehension of their children and subsequent placement with Yellowknife foster families led to their parallel rural-urban migration as they followed their children in an effort to remain geographically close to them and with the hope that they would regain custody.

Julia first meets Mona at the women's shelter in Yellowknife. She is quiet and shy, but tells Julia she wants to be interviewed. "Tomorrow, though, not today," she says. "I'm not having a good day today." The next day, Julia returns to the shelter to find Mona on the phone, crying. Julia leaves, and weeks later the two women run into each other on the street. "I could talk now," Mona says, so they go for coffee. The day Julia had seen her crying on the phone, Mona says, she'd been talking to her mother. Her mother lives

“back home” in a small community in the high Arctic. A family member died, Mona says, and she didn’t take it very well. “I’d been really good for while,” she says, “but I’m so lonely here, away from my family, so when my [family member] died I started drinking again.”

Mona is in her early 30s. She moved to Yellowknife from her home community ten years before to get away from family members who she said were violent when they drank, which was often. Back home, she and her two small children lived with her parents and several family members, ten in total, in a two-bedroom house. Like her family members, she too had troubles with alcohol. Over time, her problems worsened and a social worker visiting her community threatened to remove her children. She made the decision to move to Yellowknife in the hopes it would help her to deal with her problems. She also hoped life would be more affordable there, and that she would be able to find a job and her own place to live.

When they first arrived in Yellowknife, Mona and her two children moved in with friends while they waited six months to get on the public housing waiting list. Mona’s friends didn’t party, and so she managed to avoid drinking for the most part while staying with them. However, soon after she and her children were finally matched with a public housing unit, Mona met a man named Harry, who quickly moved in with them. Harry worked and took care of most of the bills. But he also drank heavily on occasion, and when he did, he wanted Mona to drink with him, which she did. Harry was physically abusive when he was drunk, and he beat Mona many times when they had both been drinking.

Mona had two more children with Harry, but over time, their drinking worsened. After neighbours complained, Social Services visited the apartment. After Harry beat Mona so badly she was hospitalized, he was arrested and a social worker placed the children in foster care. Mona stopped drinking for a while so she could work to get her children back while Harry was in jail. Once he was released a few months later, however, he came to live with her again and the drinking and violence resumed. Following another particularly violent episode, Harry was once again arrested. It was at this point that the Housing Authority notified Mona that she would be evicted from her family-sized public housing unit because her children were no longer in her custody. Furthermore, because the unit had been damaged during her fights with Harry, she now had arrears to pay to the Housing Authority.

Evicted and heartbroken at the loss of her children, Mona slept on a friend's couch for a couple of weeks until she overstayed her welcome. She then went to the women's shelter where she had been on and off for five years before she and I first met. Due her ongoing struggles with alcohol, and her homelessness, she has been unable to regain custody of her children. In the meantime, her family members back home have sobered up, and asked her to move home. "I don't want to move back there, because my children are here," she says. In Yellowknife, Mona is also able to access some counseling resources for her addictions and has become a part of a church community that she tells me provides her with strength and support. "I want to get my kids back," she says, wiping tears from her eyes. "When I lost them was when things really hit rock bottom for me."

The child welfare system has a complex role in the reproduction of homelessness. The concentration of Northwest Territories foster families in Yellowknife motivates some

parents to stay in the city despite not having housing, or despite other compounding factors such as lack of stable employment options. Some parents also move from their communities to Yellowknife to be closer to children in care, a tactic that was used strategically by the federal government during the days of residential school to encourage centralization (Tester and Kulchyski 1994). The desire to remain close to children, to go so far as to move communities in order to follow them to Yellowknife, is a profound testament to the significance of family in the lives of many research participants and is demonstrative of the home/journeying efforts of many homeless parents.

However, the dearth of public housing available to single adults makes it incredibly difficult for parents to work to regain custody of their children. Those women who followed their children to Yellowknife had moved out of the public housing they held in their home communities to be close to their children, but in the end, made the possibility of regaining custody that much more difficult once that they were out of housing. In Yellowknife, where public housing is more regulated and competition for units is higher, once children are apprehended, the parent loses the “right” to stay in a family-sized dwelling. With very few single adult dwellings, once their children were apprehended by Social Services, the parents in this study were evicted with nowhere else to stay but at emergency shelters. A parent needs to be in secure housing, among other requirements, in order to regain custody of her children. The road from the shelter back into housing is fraught with challenges, especially in Yellowknife where the options for affordable, accessible housing are so limited. Several women also spoke of racial discrimination in the private rental market and offered stories where they had felt doubly judged for being Indigenous and for not having their children in their custody.

Two important issues are present here. First, the child welfare system continues to act in a reactive sense towards what are the persistent legacies of the social, cultural and spiritual damage inflicted through the colonization process. Moreover, the present-day context of welfare colonialism continues to erode the security of those Indigenous northerners who experience socio-economic marginalization. To date, there are no programs or resources in place in the Northwest Territories to assist families and communities in dealing with the root causes behind the apprehension of children through the child welfare system. Though it may indeed be that in some cases a family cannot be reunited, it is clear from the accounts in this research that there are many examples where parents' desire to remain close to their children is resisted by social policy. Secondly, once children are removed, there are very few programs or resources in place to support parents in their efforts to regain custody of their children. The programs and resources that do exist are separate from the housing needs of a parent seeking to regain custody of her children. This gap is institutionalized through separation of social services from housing. In other words, there are no commitments on the part of the Housing Authority to support parents seeking to regain custody of their children, and this is deeply problematic. What does exist is transitional housing available through the YWCA and the Centre for Northern Families, both of which have long waiting lists. Greater coordinated efforts need to be made to recognize the home/journeying efforts of homeless parents and work to support them to ideally regain custody of their children.

Indigenous home/journeying

The discursive practices of dependency are firmly in place within northern social policy and its treatment of homelessness and related social issues. While much of this discourse would have one believe that northern homeless men and women are complacent in their dependency, many of the life stories shared during this research suggested that in fact many homeless men and women make concerted efforts to resist dependency through home/journeying strategies. Camping out, going out on the land, or spending time with Elders were home/journeying strategies used by homeless men and women in an effort not only to resist dependency, but also as expressions of self-determination and home-building.

The critical role that family and community play in Indigenous homes, and the deep wounding that results from their loss, highlights the mutual interchangeability between an absence of 'home' and Indigenous homelessness. This disruption of the social fabric of Indigenous families and communities goes hand-in-hand with a fractured sense of belonging and connection to 'place'. Yet the profound significance of family and community, and the sense of rootedness sought from these relationships, can also be read in the many strategies of home/journeying documented here. More than a site of collective wounding, families and communities are also "the source of restoration and renewal" (Kirmayer et al. 2003: 21).

Paul, one of this story's authors, is also a residential school survivor. He worked hard for years to find his place back in his community once he had completed school, struggling to relearn his language and the skills required for life on the land. Similarly, Ruth is a support provider who described *feeling* homeless years after returning to her home community from residential school, despite the fact that she had a job, housing and

a close-knit family. This story of spiritual homelessness is very common, shared with us both (Paul and Julia) time and again by colleagues, friends and family members who have felt disconnected from a sense of place, belonging and Indigenous identity. These stories also highlight in clear and undeniable ways the colonial context within which geographies of Indigenous homelessness must be understood (Christensen 2013).

One of the objectives we set out to realize in this chapter was to expand the definition of spiritual homelessness to include conflicts in cultural values and social policy paradigms. It is clear from the personal narratives shared here that social policy, and the value framework it embodies, plays a critical role in the reproduction of spiritual homelessness. While public housing policy resulted in the immediate literal homelessness of many homeless men and women in this study, it also intensified disconnection from family and community by preventing some research participants from staying with families, or in their home communities. Meanwhile, interactions between public housing policy and the child welfare system also resulted in the immediate, literal homelessness of many parents. At the same time, the particular geography of the northern children welfare system served to not only disconnect parents from their children, but also from important social networks in their home communities.

In this chapter, we have further argued that one of the key driving forces behind Indigenous homelessness is the welfare colonialism implicit in northern social policy. The narratives of homelessness explored here illustrate the ways in which key social policies and programs reinforce dominant norms and penalize those who do not comply. They also illustrate the many ways in which “home/journeying” (Mallett 2004) efforts are implicit in many research participants’ experiences of homelessness. Yet part of the self-

fulfilling strategy inherent to welfare colonialism is a blindness to these efforts, to their strength, and to the potential for meaningful change that could come from social policy that better recognized and supported home/journeying efforts.

The 2012 Minister's Forum on Addictions and Community Wellness, however, suggests that there is a growing awareness in the Northwest Territories that culturally-relevant responses are needed in order to effectively address the high rates of trauma and substance abuse in the territory. The Forum's final report and recommendations appear promising for the delivery of health and wellness programs in the Northwest Territories. One of the main outcomes of the report is a call for an improved understanding of "how colonization, residential schools and rapid socio-economic change have shaped the mental wellness of NWT residents" (GNWT 2013: 18). In particular, it is clear that the growing call for health and social programs to better reflect diverse Indigenous cultures and community needs across the territory is finally being recognized. There is significant potential for these changes to bring about positive impacts on the lives of northern homeless men and women.

However, alongside these promising changes is the continued urgency of an increasingly punitive northern housing market, one where private housing rises in unaffordability and public housing units deplete in number. The globalizing northern economy also brings with it higher competition and greater requirements in terms of education, certification and security in order to access employment (Christensen 2009). Rates of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) (Badry and Wight Felske 2013), suicide (Tester and McNicoll 2004), and incarceration (StatsCan 2009) all continue to rise across the Canadian North, and disproportionately among Indigenous northerners. At

the same time, the apprehension of Indigenous children into the child welfare system is at a historical high across Canada, and the situation is no different in the North.

However, bureaucratic practices fragment home and homelessness, institutionalizing false boundaries around inextricably linked elements like health, housing and social security. This fragmentation effectively disarms resilience efforts and makes it very difficult to resist the structural elements that drive homelessness. The dynamics of welfare colonialism have served to fragment Indigenous homes and act as both a significant cause of Indigenous homelessness and an obstacle in its alleviation. Significantly, the Minister's Forum recognized this, arguing that "there is a need to increase awareness that mental health and addictions are related to other problems and can be improved by addressing basic quality of life issues such as housing, income support and education" (GNWT 2013: 18). However, these factors affect much more than "basic quality of life". Rather, they are integral to a sense of home and in this way play a significant role in the geographies of homelessness among northern Indigenous men and women.

One of the ways in which contemporary northern social policy perpetuates pathways to homelessness is by failing to recognize the home/journeying strategies of homeless men and women, many of which reflect the diverse cultural value frameworks of northern Indigenous communities. Herein lie some important clues about the places where additional supports are necessary in order to build upon the strength and agency of homeless men and women. In order to achieve marked improvements in health and wellness, there need to be parallel improvements in family supports, housing, and income security for individuals and families across the territory. However, the approach by

government is to fragment and compartmentalize health, social supports, housing, education, employment, and so on, creating false categories where northern Indigenous knowledge frameworks would see them as fitting together. The findings of the Northwest Territories Minister's Forum are a huge step in the right direction. Yet to truly address the role of health and rebuilding from trauma in geographies of Indigenous homelessness requires the addition of housing, social supports, education and employment in an overall wellness plan, and the support of home/journeying efforts.

H

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ⁱ Core housing need is a phrase used by both the federal and territorial governments to refer to housing that does not meet adequacy, suitability, and affordability norms. According to the Northwest Territories Bureau of Statistics (GNWT 2010), 35.5 percent of households experience core housing need in the rural settlement communities. In fact, some communities report that as many as 77 percent of households are in core housing need (GNWT 2010).

ⁱⁱ In total, Julia conducted ninety-five biographical interviews with homeless men and women in both study communities (May 2000a). She also conducted six focus groups, three in each study community, with groups of either homeless men or women, ranging from four to twelve participants each. Also employing a purposeful sampling strategy, she conducted fifty-five in-depth, semi-structured interviews with representatives from the territorial and Indigenous governments, representatives of NGOs and support providers working in shelter provision, social work and homeless advocacy.

ⁱⁱⁱ Between 2007 and 2010, as part of her doctoral research (Christensen 2011), Christensen conducted ninety-five interviews with homeless men and women using a biographical interview approach (May 2000a). This approach involves the use of in-depth, semi-structured conversational interviews to “map” an individual’s experiences with homelessness and housing insecurity over time. Importantly, biographical interviews both compliment and facilitate the pathways to homelessness approach by illustrating “the factors shaping a person’s movements in and out of homelessness” (May 2000a, 615). Christensen also conducted six focus groups, three in each study community, with groups of either homeless men or women, ranging from four to twelve participants each. Four of the focus groups were conducted at shelters in each community. The remaining two focus groups included community members who identified housing insecurity and homelessness as pertinent issues in their lives. Christensen also conducted fifty-five in-depth, semi-structured interviews with representatives from the territorial and Aboriginal governments, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and support providers working in shelter provision, social work, and homeless advocacy. Participants were selected in order to get a solid representation of people who interact with homeless people from all angles: lending support, implementing programs, and through governance.