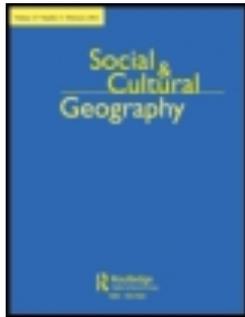


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‘Our home, our way of life’: spiritual homelessness and the sociocultural dimensions of Indigenous homelessness in the Northwest Territories (NWT), Canada

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In this article, I examine the sociocultural dimensions of Indigenous home and homelessness through a case study of increasing visible homelessness in two northern Canadian communities. Drawing on five years of ethnographic research on Indigenous homelessness in Yellowknife and Inuvik, two regional centres in the Northwest Territories (NWT), Canada, I suggest that Indigenous experiences of homelessness are at once collective and immediate. In particular, I draw on the concept of ‘spiritual homelessness’ (Keys Young 1998) to examine the multiple scales of homelessness experienced among northern Indigenous people. Research participants highlight several key elements of rapid sociocultural change that have an enduring impact on a collective sense of home and belonging, and play integral roles in shaping the experiences of homeless Indigenous people. Social and material exclusion, breakdowns in family and community, detachment from cultural identity, intergenerational trauma and institutionalisation are all woven throughout the personal narratives of homelessness articulated by research participants. I argue that the alleviation of Indigenous homelessness in the NWT depends on a decolonising agenda that specifically addresses contemporary colonial geographies and their expressions in the key institutions in Indigenous peoples’ lives.

Key words: Indigenous peoples, Aboriginal, homelessness, housing, Canadian North.

Introduction

When the government took our land, bush camps and traplines away, they took away our homes. That was our home. That was our way of life (Sarah).

Sarah, an Indigenous social worker in Inuvik, Northwest Territories (NWT), Canada, has had many personal experiences with

homelessness. Not only has she herself been homeless in the past, three of her adult siblings remain homeless. During our interview, and in many other conversations we shared, Sarah described homelessness in its broadest sense. Repeatedly, she connected her former homelessness and the homelessness of her siblings to rapid sociocultural change brought about through colonialism. By contrast, home, to her,

did not signify a house, but rather the sense of security that came from independence and the freedom to live the ‘way of life’ that her people had lived for generations.

In 2007, I began five years of ethnographic fieldwork on visible homelessness in Inuvik and Yellowknife, two small but urbanising¹ centres in the NWT. Yellowknife and Inuvik are the principal administrative, transportation and economic development centres of the territory (see Figure 1). I set out to focus on what I believed then to be an emerging phenomenon of visible homelessness, something that local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) suspected was a negative social impact of an economic boom that began in the late 1990s (see GNWT [Government of the NWT] 2005):

the opening of two diamond mines and increased speculation around the proposed Mackenzie Gas Project brought about significant economic expansion in Yellowknife and Inuvik. At the same time, visible homelessness in the two communities first appeared, and subsequently raised significant public concern when emergency shelters in both locales began reporting a steady increase in demand (IIC [Inuvik Interagency Committee] 2003; Webster 2006). By 2008, the Yellowknife Homelessness Coalition (YHC) was reporting that approximately 5 per cent of the city’s population of 18,700 experienced episodic or chronic homelessness resulting in shelter stays (YHC 2008). A similar attempt at enumeration has not been performed in Inuvik, although anecdotal



Figure 1 Map of study communities in the Northwest Territories (Eades 2010).

reports from service providers in 2008 suggested that anywhere from 50 to 100 adults (1.4–2.8 per cent of the town's population of 3,484) experienced homelessness.²

As a non-Indigenous person born and raised in Yellowknife, and as a volunteer support provider to homeless youth, adults and families in the community, I saw through my own experiences that emergency shelter need was growing. Meanwhile, anecdotal reports from friends and colleagues in Inuvik indicated similar developments there too. Through my research, I came to understand³ that 90–95 per cent of homeless men and women in both communities are Indigenous.⁴ I also discovered that the majority of homeless Indigenous people in both communities identified an outlying rural settlement as their home community. Push factors from rural settlements to urban centres included chronic housing need in smaller communities, along with spatialised socio-economic disadvantage as a result of the northern settlement history, and rural–urban migration motivated or enforced by the child welfare and correctional systems. These factors all disproportionately impact Indigenous northerners. Elsewhere (see Christensen 2012), I argue that this uneven geography contributes to the over-representation of Indigenous northerners at emergency shelters in Yellowknife and Inuvik.⁵

Numerous other studies have also found Indigenous people to be over-represented among homeless people in rural and urban areas across Canada (see Beavis, Klos, Carter and Douchant 1997; Golden, Currie, Greaves and Latimer 1999; Peters and Robillard 2009) and in the USA, Australia and New Zealand (see Collins 2010; Geisler and George 2006; Kearns 2006; Kearns, Smith and Abbott 1991; Memmott and Chambers 2008; Westerfelt and Yellow Bird 1999). However, only a small body of work has explored the particular

reasons *why* Indigenous people are so highly over-represented in the general homeless population (see Menzies 2009; Peters 2012; Peters and Robillard 2009; Wente 2000).

Moreover, many scholars have suggested that colonialism has particular, ongoing effects on the lives of homeless Indigenous people (Menzies 2009; Peters and Robillard 2009; Wente 2000). However, what this means in terms of the homeless experiences of Indigenous people is not well examined in the academic literature. In part, this is due to an inadequate explanation of what homelessness signifies in an Indigenous community context. By exploring the dimensions of Indigenous homelessness in northern Canada, I aim to address these gaps. One way forward, I suggest, is to understand Indigenous experiences of homelessness as multi-scalar and at once collective *and* immediate.

In this article, I set out to examine the dimensions of home and homelessness in a Canadian northern Indigenous context in order to understand the significance and scale of increasing visible homelessness in two northern communities. I explore the context-dependent nature of home and homelessness, and suggest that local interpretations of their meaning and scope frame our understanding of what homelessness *is* and how it occurs. Finally, I argue that socio-structural factors underlying geographies of Indigenous homelessness can be examined through the concept of 'spiritual homelessness' (Keys Young 1998) and its emphasis on collective experience. Through this analysis, my intent is to provide a way forward in not only understanding Indigenous homelessness in northern Canada, but also in advancing our understanding of Indigenous homelessness in other settler societies, particularly the USA, Australia and New Zealand. In so doing, I provide insight into the qualitatively unique experiences of Indigenous homelessness

while informing the development of culturally appropriate support services in rural and urban settings alike (see Coombes, Johnson and Howitt 2012; DeVerteuil and Wilson 2010; Wendt and Gone 2012).

Biographies of homelessness

Homelessness pathways are the diverse, complex routes that one may take into, through and out of homelessness (Anderson 2001). A biographical interview approach (May 2000a) involves the use of in-depth, semi-structured conversational interviews to ‘map’ these pathways over time, and allows for an exploration of both agency and socio-structural elements in understanding the diverse factors that guide individual experiences. In total, I conducted ninety-five biographical interviews⁶ with homeless men and women in both study communities (May 2000a; Table 1).

Of the ninety-five interviews with homeless men and women, eighty-seven were Indigenous, which corresponded with support providers’ estimates of the rate of Indigenous representation among homeless people in general. Two key factors help to explain the over-representation of men: (1) Indigenous

men have been found to have the poorest rates of mental health, and highest rates of addiction and suicide relative to the rest of the Canadian population, factors that contribute significantly to homelessness (Kirmayer, Simpson and Cargo 2003); and (2) women tend to be more vulnerable to hidden forms of homelessness, which could account for why women are under-represented in emergency shelter users (Klodawsky 2006; Watson and Austerberry 1986).

I 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. All focus group participants also participated in biographical interviews. Focus group discussions explored the meaning and context of housing insecurity in the NWT, perceptions of sociocultural change and its impacts on homelessness, and support service needs. While ranging in age from 19 to 72, the majority of interview participants were between the ages of 25 and 55, a sample that represents the demographics of homelessness in both communities as described by local shelters and advocacy groups (IIC 2003; YHC 2008).

Also employing a purposeful sampling strategy, I conducted fifty-five in-depth, semi-structured interviews⁷ with representatives from the territorial and Indigenous governments, representatives of NGOs and support providers working in shelter provision, social work and homeless advocacy. Participants were selected in order to get a comprehensive representation of people who interact with homeless people from various angles: lending support, implementing programmes and through governance. Early on in the research process, it also became apparent that several support providers themselves had first-hand experiences with homelessness. This added a new and unanticipated dimension to the

Table 1 Profile of homeless research participants by Indigenous/non-Indigenous status and gender

Study community	Number of participants	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Yellowknife			
Men	40	34	6
Women	15	15	0
Subtotal	55	49	6
Inuvik			
Men	33	31	2
Women	7	7	0
Subtotal	40	38	2
Total	95	87	8

research, as I was able to speak with them about their own experiences and the various ways in which they transitioned out of homelessness.

While I proceeded through the research, I began to understand homelessness as a much more complex phenomenon than an immediate, individual experience. Through my interview with Sarah, and many others like her, I began to consider the multiple scales of homelessness, particularly in relation to Indigenous peoples and communities, where the scope of sociocultural change has been so wide reaching, and the pace so accelerated. As I discuss later in this article, it was only in the early to mid-twentieth century that previously nomadic Indigenous peoples in the NWT were drawn to emerging settlements as a result of state-sanctioned colonial interventions and their impacts on northern social and economic landscapes. Thus, in the context of the NWT, time and space have collided as the real implications of colonialism have been felt most intimately only as far back as two or three generations. In this article, I argue that the 'recent' phenomenon of homelessness is in fact symptomatic of this period of profound change and upheaval.

Home/homelessness as a multidimensional concept

While the dominant view in the literature acknowledges homelessness as a multidimensional experience (see Cloke, May and Johnsen 2010; DeVerteuil, May and Von Mahs 2009; Klodawsky 2006; May 2000b; Somerville 1992), it ultimately understands that experience as fundamentally rooted in a lack of housing (Hulchanski 2005). Though a lack of housing is a key factor in immediate, individual experiences of homelessness, throughout this

study, research participants articulated perspectives on homelessness that cast the view outside of the house or apartment and instead focused on home as a sense of 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger 1962).

Somerville (1992) has articulated this distinction in a different way. The predominant view, he argues, is a practical, or literal, one that understands homelessness as a matter of 'rooflessness'. Instead, he suggests, homelessness can be conceptualised as 'rootlessness', an ontological state of being that implies the absence of a sense of place, or a sense of home (Somerville 1992).

Veness (1993: 319) has argued that the specific components comprised in 'home' are 'contextually-constructed' according to cultural, social and individual values, wants and needs. For example, in Dene⁸ tradition, mobility—the act of moving from place to place and encountering all the storied knowledge that sits in those places—is integral to a sense of home (see Andrews 2004). Meanwhile, 'home' in a Maori context is inextricably tied to the land. For example, Maori regard themselves as *tangata whenua*, or 'people of the land' (see Hay 1998), illustrating a sense of place that is deeply embedded in geography and an intimate knowledge of *places*.

Meanwhile, the concepts of home and homelessness that are most predominantly represented in the academic literature are embedded in 'broadly white Western conceptions of home [that] privilege a physical structure or dwelling' (Mallett 2004: 65). Yet as Veness (1993) suggests in her research on rural poverty and housing in the USA, the emphasis on the home as 'house' serves to privilege certain societal interests at the neglect of others whose own conceptualisations of home might not subscribe to the same material ideals. Similarly,

May (2000b) researching homelessness in the UK critiques normative constructions of 'home as residence' and suggests that 'home as place' is a more appropriate framework for understanding the significance of homelessness. 'Home as place' does not necessitate a rootedness-in-place, but it does imply an emotional, spiritual or psychological attachment to place as intrinsic to a sense of home.

Fittingly, Duncan and Lambert (2004: 395) write that home is 'perhaps the most emotive of geographical concepts, inextricable from that of self, family, nation, sense of place, and sense of responsibility toward those who share one's place in the world'. Blunt and Dowling (2006: 254) suggest that the meaning of home, then, arises through the relationship between material and imaginative realms and processes—home is lived as well as imagined. They (2006: 256) also argue that home and identity are indelibly linked, 'whereby people's senses of themselves are related to and produced through lived and metaphorical experiences of home.

Thus, home is not only a multifaceted concept, but also multi-scalar (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Marston 2004). In particular, Marston (2004) suggests that home itself is a socially constructed scale that, through its material and imaginative geographies, extends beyond the house and household to produce and shape broader scales as well. In the context of Indigenous peoples globally, the concept of 'homeland' is a profoundly cultural and political scalar concept that is rooted in the same relations of belonging and identity embedded in the meaning of home (see Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Berger 1988). Writing on the New Zealand context, Kearns (2006) suggests that the ontological significance of home is demonstrated by the experiences of Maori who live away from their homelands,

but whose connections to those places are nonetheless potent.

Despite the central role of place in shaping geographies of home (see May 2000b; Somerville 1992), the cultural context of home and its meaning remain poorly explored (Mallett 2004). Thornton (2008: 4) writes that place has been central to cultural (re)production in all societies and 'can be said to constitute a cultural system'. Though this relationship is one that is experienced across cultures, Thornton (2008) asserts that Indigenous peoples have a special relationship to place, maintained with the landscapes they have inhabited since time immemorial. Citing Harvey (1996), Easthope (2004) also suggests that when external forces threaten one's sense of place, the possibility for rootedness diminishes. Extrapolating on these ideas, we can begin to understand the profound sense of rootlessness that may come about when a relationship to place, both collectively and individually formed, becomes fragmented or fractured. Moreover, we begin to recognise the ways in which immediate, individual experiences of homelessness among Indigenous people are indelibly tied to collective experiences such as colonisation, sociocultural change and intergenerational trauma.

Indigenous geographies of homelessness

Throughout the twentieth century, historical and contemporary Canadian social policy has undermined and disrupted Indigenous families in Canada (Ball 2009), leading to the widespread severing of family and community ties and to what Menzies (2009: 3) terms a 'homeless state'. Geisler and George (2006), writing on Native American experiences in the USA, call the myriad colonial interventions and subsequent displacements experienced by

Indigenous people the 'other homelessness', that is, homelessness that is more than the absence of shelter. Homelessness, they suggest, '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' (Geisler and George 2006: 26).

These 'displacements' lie at the heart of what Keys Young (1998) term 'spiritual homelessness', a concept they developed to explain the broader significance of homelessness in the Australian Aborigine and Torres Strait Islander context. Keys Young (1998) found that Indigenous homelessness was perceived by many Indigenous people as being commonly experienced at the level of family and community, rather than solely by individuals. Through their findings, they argue that Australian Indigenous peoples' experiences of homelessness cannot be extracted from the historical experiences of Indigenous people, and in this way are qualitatively distinct. Thus, spiritual homelessness serves to articulate Indigenous experiences of homelessness as multi-layered and multi-scalar, 'encompass[ing] a broad range of situations and experiences, including physical, spiritual and cultural dimensions' (Keys Young 1998: 25).

Drawing on Keys Young (1998), Memmott and Chambers (2008) further developed the concept of spiritual homelessness. Spiritual homelessness, they suggest, is:

a state arising from: (a) separation from traditional land, (b) separation from family and kinship networks, or (c) a crisis of personal identity wherein one's understanding or knowledge of how one relates to country, family and Aboriginal identity systems is confused. (Memmott and Chambers 2008: 2)

In their work, Memmott and Chambers (2008) employ a pathways approach to

explore Indigenous homelessness in inner city Sydney, Australia. Research participants articulated common experiences of poor mental and physical health, addiction, violence and crime, insecure housing (hidden homelessness), racism and intergenerational homelessness (Memmott and Chambers 2008). Framing these factors, however, was a collective experience of spiritual homelessness, also known colloquially in the Australian Aborigine context as 'Koori home-sickness'.

Ruth, a social worker who works with homeless women in the NWT, illustrated the broad scope and significance of spiritual homelessness when she described her own experiences, not of literal homelessness but of a powerful sense of dis-belonging in her home community. Taken away to residential school when she was very young, she returned permanently to her community at the age of 18. Even though she has lived there ever since, and relearned her language, she told me she feels a sense of homelessness nonetheless. 'Those early years were really important', she said. 'Missing those, I lost out on a lot, including a real sense of home here'.

Spiritual homelessness encompasses the idea of rootlessness (Somerville 1992), but at the same time situates experiences of homelessness within the cultural significance of place and the consequences of socio-cultural upheaval for Indigenous people in settler societies. Applying this concept to the Canadian North, spiritual homelessness acknowledges the presence of varying degrees of homeless experience among northern Indigenous people—from collective experiences of colonialism and displacement, to cultural detachment or family stress, to individual experiences of homelessness such as a lack of shelter.

Colonialism, residential school and inter-generational trauma

Before contact, my ancestors travelled constantly, following the caribou herds for meat or looking to find good year-round fish lakes. They were born on the land and they died on the land. They roamed across Denendeh⁹ and settled nowhere. (Blondin 1997: vi)

The transition from land to settlement, so recent in the history of northern Canada, marked a profound and fundamental change to the ways of life of northern Indigenous peoples. As Blondin (1997: vi) continues, ‘when trading posts were built, people began to stay in one place’. Two key events collided by the mid-twentieth century: the fur trade began to decline and, at the same time, the Canadian government became increasingly interested in the riches of northern resource development. Northern settlements facilitated the delivery of public health services and rations, and at the same time guaranteed a captive workforce.

The ‘settlement’ of the North and its peoples had everlasting effects on northern Indigenous social and cultural geographies. In particular, it facilitated the collection of children as part of the residential school system, one of the most tragic and destructive ‘defining moments’ of colonial intervention in Canada (Thornton 2008). Beginning in the nineteenth century, the Canadian government developed a policy of aggressive assimilation to be implemented by residential schools, which were church-run, but funded by the federal Department of Indian Affairs. Though cultural assimilation was clearly a main objective of the residential school system, a parallel objective was to facilitate the displacement of Indigenous people from their lands (de Leeuw 2009).

Attendance at the schools was mandatory and strictly enforced by government agents. De Leeuw (2009: 123) argues that in Canada,

‘Aboriginal children and concepts of childhood were focal points of colonialism’. Few children received an adequate education in these establishments and were instead taught to be ashamed of their languages and cultural identities. Indigenous families were delegitimised, and the knowledge of parents and grandparents undermined by teachers and administrators (Lavallee and Poole 2010; Ruttan, LaBoucane-Benson and Munroe 2010)—all elements that gave ‘place’ to children and were integral to a sense of home (Fournier and Crey 1997). Many children were also victims of physical and sexual abuse, and disease and mortality rates were extremely high (Brasfield 2001; Degagné 2007).

Psychologists have coined the term ‘residential school syndrome’ to explain a host of behaviours exhibited by residential school survivors that mirror those found in post-traumatic stress disorder, such as emotional detachment, substance abuse, anger issues, sleep disturbances and intrusive memories (Brasfield 2001). However, other scholars have argued that residential school syndrome is in fact a symptom of historical trauma, a ‘generalized intergenerational condition dating back to the days of colonization’ (Hawkeye Robertson 2006: 2).

Indigenous scholars describe historical or intergenerational trauma as a collective emotional and psychological wounding that occurs over the lifespan and across generations (Yellow Horse Brave Heart 2003). Trauma has been widely linked to poor mental health among Indigenous people in Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand (Harris et al. 2006; Kirmayer, Brass and Tait 2000; Manson et al. 1996; Robin, Chester and Goldman 1996; Taylor and Sharpe 2008). At the same time, individual trauma is also known to play a critical role in shaping homeless experiences among the general homeless populations in

rural and urban settings across these same countries (Kim and Ford 2006; Robinson 2005; Stewart et al. 2004; Taylor and Sharpe 2008). Yet a focus on individual traumas does not adequately describe Indigenous experiences of homelessness (Kirmayer, Brass and Tait 2000), where trauma is especially linked to colonisation (Cedar Project Partnership et al. 2008) and the cumulative impact of government policies on Indigenous peoples (Menzies 2009). Thus, Kirmayer, Brass and Tait (2000) suggest that the many forms of violence against individual Indigenous people are actually structural in their roots. For Indigenous homeless men and women across settler societies, individual traumas are bound up in, and further complicated by, the broader dynamics of collective trauma.

However, the roots of collective trauma among Indigenous people are not located solely in the past. With each era of post-contact Indigenous history in Canada, new policies have resulted in the removal of Indigenous children from their homes, be it residential schools, foster care and group homes, or non-Indigenous adoptive families¹⁰ (Fournier and Crey 1997). In his research in Toronto, Canada, Menzies (2009) found that Indigenous homeless people consistently reported personal or family histories of traumatic events that resulted in the severing of ties from family or community of origin. One explanation for this was the contemporary child welfare system, which after residential school 'became the new instrument of government assimilation policies' (Menzies 2009: 2).

Menzies (2009: 2) argues that 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'. Today, there are more Indigenous children in foster care than there

ever were at the height of the residential school system (CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] 2011). There are undoubtedly many caring families in the Canadian child welfare system. However, the factors driving the disproportionate representation of Indigenous children within the system speak to a profound degree of structural violence on Indigenous children and the glaring failure on the part of the Canadian state to meaningfully and productively care for Indigenous family and community needs. These factors also speak of the high rates of family violence and child abuse in many Indigenous communities, which are widely linked to the intergenerational impacts of colonialism (Fournier and Crey 1997; Warry 1998). At best, the contemporary child welfare system provides a responsive measure against the effects of intergenerational trauma on Indigenous families. At worst, it continues a cycle of displacement that began with colonisation. As a result, many Indigenous children in care are effectively homeless from an early age (Menzies 2009).

Northern home and homelessness

The Canadian North comprises homelands of the Dene, Inuit and Métis, and each Indigenous 'group' embodies significant heterogeneity within its respective boundaries. To fully examine the meanings of 'home' in such diverse northern Indigenous contexts requires more space and time than this article allows. Here, the emphasis is placed on research participants' accounts of the meaning of home. While 'home' is conceived and experienced in different ways between and within the ethnic and cultural bounds of these Indigenous groups, certain elements, such as the land and cultural identity, family and

community, and independence, thread them together. These core elements are woven throughout the understandings of home that I detail in this article, their significance conveyed largely through personal narratives of rapid sociocultural change, residential school and experiences with the child welfare system.

Yet colonial geographies not only shape the social landscape of northern homelessness, but also produce a distinct, uneven material landscape. While Yellowknife and Inuvik both emerged largely through the concentration of northern resource development and administrative activity, many northern rural settlements were entrenched predominantly through the Canadian government's resettlement policy in the mid-twentieth century, which was a deliberate effort to centralise previously nomadic populations across northern Canada (Wenzel 2008).

While Yellowknife and Inuvik have relatively large populations, the populations in twenty-nine of the thirty-three communities in the NWT are well below 1,000 (GNWT 2009). Furthermore, most northern rural settlements are beyond the highway system, accessible only by air and, for some, winter ice road. The relative geographic isolation of northern rural settlements is compounded by the fact that, because most were not formed around a sustainable economic base, there is a critical shortage of formal sector employment opportunities, and dependency on public housing is relatively high (Tester 2009).

As a result, rural settlement communities emerge as places of disadvantage relative to urbanising centres, whose economies are grounded in non-renewable resource extractive industries and federal/territorial administration. DeVerteuil (2005) explains such geographical exclusion as a social isolation from mainstream opportunities, such as wage employment, which

has a disproportionate impact on Indigenous northerners, as they comprise the bulk of the populations in northern rural settlement communities. Though Indigenous populations are highest in number in the four larger communities, the twenty-nine northern rural settlements are predominantly Indigenous in population.

While smaller communities are mostly dependent on public housing, private housing markets exist in the larger communities. Here, however, recent economic growth due to resource development has meant an unprecedented private rental housing crunch; low vacancy combined with the high incomes from government and industry employment motivates an expensive, exclusive private rental market. Meanwhile, efforts to move away from its role in public housing provision have led the GNWT to increase its scrutiny of public housing residents, including the recent implementation of a 'no tolerance' policy on arrears that led to widespread public housing evictions in 2012 (CBC 2012) as well as selling off some of its stock in larger market communities. The decreasing number of public housing units in Yellowknife and Inuvik has meant a dramatic reduction in units available for single adults (see Falvo 2011). Changes to the provision of public housing have a marked impact on Indigenous northerners, for over 90 per cent of public housing in the NWT houses Indigenous people (GNWT 2009).

In addition to precarious housing options in northern urbanising centres, employment is equally tenuous, particularly with the rise in regulation around employment motivated by the growth of high-security industries such as diamond mining. Developments around mandatory drug testing and criminal records checks have a particularly negative impact on homeless people (see Christensen 2011).

Conceptualisations of home and homelessness in a northern Indigenous context are thus situated within a distinct material landscape. Ideals of home, rooted in the land, the family and independence, are disrupted and challenged by the social and material outcomes of colonialism and northern settlement, as well as contemporary northern social policy. It is against this backdrop that the following analysis and discussion is set.

The collective experience of sociocultural change and its role in individual experiences of homelessness

We come from a nomadic people. Not that long ago, we were still nomadic. We took care of our needs and wanted for nothing. All of a sudden, you find that you can no longer take care of yourself because you are now dependent on others. This is the trauma we are talking about. (Sarah, Indigenous support provider, Inuvik)

The pace and scope of post-contact sociocultural change in post-contact northern Indigenous communities has been well documented (Condon, Collings and Wenzel 1995; Tester and Kulchyski 1994; Wenzel 1991). Sarah's reflections above were echoed repeatedly in interviews, situating the emergence of homelessness within the overall context of colonialism and northern social policy. Here, Sarah frames trauma as not only an individual experience, but a collective one as well. The significance of 'change' expressed through the accounts of research participants added new conceptual depth to an understanding of northern homelessness by describing the phenomenon as a *process* that is (re)produced through time and across space. Homelessness in present-day NWT, then, is symptomatic of changes that have occurred throughout the

twentieth century, including the effects of colonial and paternalistic government policy, the resulting trauma and sociocultural upheaval, and the landscape of dependency and social exclusion that has consequently emerged.

Carla, an Indigenous support provider in Yellowknife, elaborates:

For generations, Aboriginal people have had the social values of others imposed on them. It's created social marginalisation ... For us, our communities and families were central, which is different than the European way of prioritising the individual [and] looking out for yourself. So we've had this system pushed on us that is counter to what we believed in, and it has meant for a lot of upheaval.

One of the most profound outcomes of rapid sociocultural change has been the introduction of new categories of difference, manifested in large part through northern social policy vis-à-vis housing and welfare programmes (see Stern 2005; Tester 2009). These categories of difference were entrenched through a paternalistic shift in government policy under the introduction of the Canadian welfare state in the mid-twentieth century (see Tester and Kulchyski 1994). The imposition of Euro-Canadian ideals regarding housing and social norms upon northern communities served to realign the world into new categories of 'right' and 'wrong', and was expressed through both material and social geographies. For example, physical differences in the kinds of housing made available to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people shaped a profound sense of social marginalisation on the part of many Indigenous northerners (Billson 2001; Tester and Kulchyski 1994). In Inuvik, newly built row housing was given to military personnel and administrators, while local Gwich'in and Inuvialuit were provided with matchbox houses deposited on the muddy soil bordering

the town's sewage lagoon. Today, similar marginalisation is represented through: (1) the rates of core housing need in rural northern settlements relative to northern urban centres; and (2) the higher reliance on public housing by Indigenous northerners relative to non-Indigenous northerners (GNWT 2009). Public housing dependency leaves many Indigenous northerners vulnerable to the ideological whims of northern social policy.

Economic change in the Canadian North throughout the twentieth century has also played a profound role in facilitating a loss of independence. The shift from a traditional, subsistence-based economy to a wage economy has been tremendous, and difficulty in transitioning, combined with geographical exclusion from employment opportunities, has forced many northern people to rely on income support (see Tester and Kulchyski 1994). The sense of dependency or vulnerability brought about through welfare was highlighted time and again as a contributing factor to housing insecurity and homelessness:

Government started to use welfare as a tool to get people to do what they wanted. They started imposing more rules in order for you to get the money. It was even used to get people to send their kids to school...they said you'll lose your welfare if you don't send your kids to [residential] school. But then the dependency grew as people relied on welfare more and more. (Moses, Indigenous support provider, Inuvik)

Reliance on income support has had profound impacts on a sense of personal security and, by extension, housing security. This was especially the case for male research participants. Several Indigenous support providers spoke of the broader sociocultural context within which Indigenous men had become homeless, suggesting that men's changing roles in their

families and communities have had considerable negative consequences for those who had been unable to transition well into the 'modern' economy (see Ball 2009; Condon, Collings and Wenzel 1995).

So profound and pervasive are the impacts of such forms of collective exclusion that social marginalisation and demoralisation are among the most commonly experienced causes of poor mental health in Indigenous communities (National Aboriginal Health Organization 2003). Thus, while individual experiences of homelessness are disenfranchising in their own particular ways, Indigenous homelessness can be connected to a much more pervasive exclusion embodied in a kind of material and social 'dis-belonging'. This connects to the sense of collective sociocultural displacement reflected in the concept of spiritual homelessness (see Keys Young 1998; Memmott and Chambers 2008).

While sociocultural change in the Canadian North has taken myriad forms, research participants highlighted several key elements of change that have had an enduring and destructive impact on a collective sense of home and belonging and subsequently shape the experiences of homeless Indigenous people. Detachment from cultural identity, breakdowns in family and community, and institutionalisation were all highlighted as significant contributors to experiences of home loss, and were woven throughout personal narratives of homelessness. In the following sections, I explore these key elements in turn. Together, they represent the multiple scales of 'dis-belonging' and 'displacement' inherent to a homelessness beyond the absence of shelter, speaking instead to the sociocultural dimensions of being homeless in one's homeland, an experience that extends to homeless Indigenous people in all settler societies.

'Northern social fabric': residential school, child welfare and breakdowns in family and community

Residential school occupied the most fundamental, wide-reaching reference point for Indigenous homeless research participants in this study. Only those participants who were middle-aged and older may have had actual first-hand experiences in residential schools. However, the intergenerational impacts of these schools, and of other forms of sociocultural upheaval, have had far-reaching effects on subsequent generations, particularly through the disruption of parenting skills (see Menzies 2009). Eleanor, a social worker in Inuvik, described this cycle of trauma in her own life:

Some of the young people who are struggling with issues today, those issues are the result of their parents' and grandparents' experiences at residential school. When I was at residential school, we received the worst treatment from the teachers there, we were told we were nothing. We didn't know how to be parents when we got out of there ... So it is a cycle, passed down to us from our teachers at residential school and from us to our own children.

Many residential school survivors reflected that they found it difficult to base their own parenting on anything other than the model that had been displayed for them at school. This in turn had a lasting impact on subsequent generations, as the degradation of culturally rooted parenting skills was passed down from parent to child (see Morrissette 1994; Rosalyn 1991). During a focus group with homeless men in Inuvik, Mark described this fracture in stark terms:

Residential school raised my Dad and then it raised me and my siblings, too. My parents weren't raised by their parents and I wasn't raised by my parents.

The intergenerational impacts of residential school were a particular concern among support providers, who through their practices saw a strong connection between the loss of parenting skills, family dysfunction and, consequently, housing insecurity. Yet while residential school delegitimised the family in the past, and while its intergenerational impacts continue to affect younger generations, support providers suggested that northern social policy only perpetuates this legacy. An account from Laura, a support provider working with homeless youth in Yellowknife, made similar observations:

Family breakdown is a [catch all] for state intervention. Family breakdowns, foster care, adoptions ... it is all leading to the breakdown of the northern social fabric. The job of this [state] system is not to help the parents function. Instead I see youth wandering around on the streets looking for their parents who are wandering around the streets ... because youth who are apprehended, they usually go back to their parents eventually. I see three generations on the street in my time here.

The failure of the social system to support 'home-building' by nurturing children and working with families in crisis perpetuates and reproduces the effects of trauma, leading to examples of intergenerational homelessness within the same family. The child welfare system was repeatedly referenced as an example of the role of social policy in the (re)production of Indigenous homelessness and of the ways in which the earlier traumas of sociocultural upheaval continue to manifest themselves in present day. These intergenerational cycles were illustrated through many personal narratives, including that of Paul, a homeless man living in Yellowknife:

I am a direct impact of residential school. The effects [of residential school] are further reaching than the government will let on. My mum was in residential school for eight years and she was really affected. And when she had me, she couldn't take care of me, and she drank. I was put in a foster home as a baby and adopted out, moved to [Saskatchewan] with my adoptive family. There were positives to that, like I got a good education. And there were negatives, like having my Aboriginal identity put down by my teachers and other people.

The relationship between homelessness and early detachment from family was striking and reflected in the number of Indigenous homeless men and women who linked child welfare experiences with their homelessness. At the same time, to have any sense of 'home' requires some knowledge of what it entails. While many homeless participants were able to reflect upon 'home' in their own lives, some found it impossible to locate similar memories or experiences. Lisa, a support provider in Yellowknife who has extensive experience working with homeless people in the community, suggested that

You need to have felt 'at home' somewhere in your life to know what being 'at home' feels like ... The problem is that there are many people, children especially who are growing up in violent homes or with instability, who grow up not knowing what home is. And so they don't know how to have that because they don't even know what to look for. And it causes this cycle, where you don't expect much for yourself so you don't get much. People who have experienced home before, experienced security, even if they hit rock bottom at some point, they have in their imagination that idea of what could be, based on what they have had before. And that imagination is a valuable resource.

Positive relationships to family and community were fundamental components of 'home'. Yet these components continue to be degraded and delegitimised by the intergenerational impacts of residential school and negative impacts of the child welfare system on both children and parents. The sense of an intergenerational wounding was reflected in many personal narratives as integral to a very early sense of homelessness, and was not only something that arose in relation to literal homelessness. Instead, it was a collective hurt identified by Indigenous support providers and Indigenous homeless people alike.

By understanding the integral role of family in forming a sense of home, we can recognise the many examples offered throughout this study of Indigenous men and women whose homelessness was in some ways demonstrative of an effort at 'home/journeying' (Mallett 2004). For example, Frank, a young homeless man, had been removed from his home in the NWT and raised in the child welfare system in Alberta, but then moved to Yellowknife as a young adult in an effort to be reunited with his biological mother, who was living at the women's shelter. Or Clara, a mother who remained homeless in Yellowknife in order to stay close to children in foster care, despite having family supports and housing available to her in her community of origin. Their stories demonstrate how certain actions might be interpreted as resulting in or perpetuating homelessness, when in reality they may be better understood as being in pursuit of a sense of 'home' and of family.

Support providers who had previously experienced homelessness also described how 'home/journeying' strategies. For example, when reflecting on their own personal experiences with intergenerational trauma, it was coupled with examples of how strength had been rebuilt. Charles, an Indigenous support

provider in Yellowknife, described how a return to ‘place’ was critical to his exit from homelessness:

I was on the street. My wife booted me out because I was no good around the kids. It was a really tough time for me ... I was drinking and couldn’t stop. One day, after a long drunk, I woke up [at the shelter] and looked around the room at all the other guys there and thought, enough. I didn’t want to be that way for my own kids, and so I said, enough. For the first time in my life, I turned to the Creator and I asked for help. I went out with my brother on his trapline and stayed out until I knew I could handle being back in town. My wife had to be real patient [laughs]. But that was where I needed to get clean, out in the bush. I really believe that is what did it for me.

Charles’ testimony describes his efforts to fight back against the cycle of trauma in his own life and parenting. For him, it was not only his own realisation that he wanted to get better for his children, it was also that the strategies he pursued to ‘get clean’ were grounded in self-determination and in his sense of place and identity as an Indigenous person.

*‘At home when I’m on the land’:
detachment from cultural connections*

Like Charles, strong cultural connections, including access to the land, featured prominently in research participants’ narratives of home. In contrast, detachment from a sense of one’s culture, particularly through cultural activities, was linked to homelessness. The significance of a close relationship to the land is very strong in the Canadian North, and similarly across Indigenous communities in other contexts (see Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Kearns 2006). Research participants

repeatedly cited ‘going out in the bush’ or ‘being out on the land’ as elements tied to a sense of home. They spoke of a sense of belonging when participating in activities that made them feel connected to their cultural heritage and ancestors. There was often a palpable restlessness when the topic of ‘the land’ came up in interviews, and also a clear tension between the challenges of life in the town or the city, and the idea that life on the land was somehow freer, a place of refuge to escape to when life got too difficult in town. ‘There are no temptations out there’, explained Moses, a man staying at the shelter in Inuvik. ‘When I’m in the bush, I can think straight’.

Three elderly homeless research participants described being born on the land before their families had moved into settlements. To them, ‘home’ was rooted in life outside the settlement, and to a time when their families had been independent in spite of the physically demanding nature of living off the land. The move to the settlement, and the subsequent fragmentation from the land, marked the beginning of new difficulties for their families.

Perry, a homeless man in Yellowknife, had a friend who lent him his cabin, as well as a snowmobile to access it, whenever he felt the need to get away. He said that it was easy to be sober out at the cabin, so he would stay out there for weeks or sometimes months at a time:

I feel comfortable and relaxed out there. It’s probably the closest thing to home I’ve ever felt. I go out there about once a month. I can do what I want and no one bothers me out there. I love being in the bush, I love that life.

In the warmer months, many of the homeless participants opted to camp out in tents on the outer edges of town for days or weeks at a

time, off and on. Above all, they described the sense of independence they felt at not having to follow the rules of a shelter, as well as their happiness at being outside and close to the land. Lily, a homeless woman in Yellowknife, illustrated the sense of freedom many homeless participants expressed at camping outside: 'I also camp out in the summer time. I love to camp. I was brought up in the bush and it is beautiful to wake up to the birds singing. It's nice and quiet and I love the privacy'.

In addition to being out on the land, having access to Elders¹¹ was also cited as important part of being 'at home'. One homeless man I interviewed described with regret how he had recently lost a new job as a janitor at the hospital because he was spending too much time sitting with the Elders. Furthermore, in all focus group discussions, time with Elders was cited in relation to 'home' and perceived to be an integral part of cultural connection as well as personal well-being.

To be clear, while a number of research participants spoke nostalgically of a more traditional life on the land, their reflections point more directly to the significance of maintaining close ties to place, and to cultural identity, in the contemporary world. Cultural connections and access to the land gave many homeless men and women a positive sense of self, a sense of belonging and a deep sense of ontological security. These relationships, be they material or symbolic, were integral to the descriptions of home offered by homeless research participants. Meanwhile, an absence of cultural connections was strongly associated with homelessness, for it contributed to an overall sense of detachment from place. In deeply meaningful ways, experiences of homelessness extend well beyond access to shelter, to encompass access to knowledge, relationships and activities that support a sense of cultural identity and connection as well.

Institutionalisation and loss of independence

Many research participants described a desire for independence and self-determination that was complicated by ongoing interactions with a diverse set of social institutions over the course of their lives. Participants also spoke of a lack of problem-solving skills, as well as skills needed to thrive in the world of rent paying, job seeking and other activities emphasised in modern-day independent living. Support providers attributed this lack of independence to a complex process of institutionalisation resulting from the main institutional systems in homeless peoples' lives: residential school, child welfare, corrections, income support and public housing, and the emergency shelter. Many support providers also drew links between the kind of control evident through the residential school system, and the modes of paternalism inherent to the criminal justice and child welfare systems. The role of institutionalisation in homelessness was therefore described as both a temporal and spatial process, manifesting itself in different ways across time and enacted through specific material tools, such as the residential school, group home or prison.

The institutionalisation of Indigenous people, argues Clarkson (2009), must be understood as an extension of Canada's colonial history. The experiences of homeless men and women in residential school or foster care, for example, instilled an early sense of being controlled or regulated vis-à-vis the education (residential school) or child welfare systems. Both first-hand and intergenerational experiences with residential school or child welfare often diminished a sense of independence, and were frequently connected by research participants to subsequent adult experiences with institutions in the forms of

jails and shelters, but also social welfare. This dynamic echoes the work of Wacquant (2001), and the concept of a ‘carceral continuum’, which denotes the flow from ghetto to prison to ghetto and so on that ensnares a growing number of young African American men. A similar feedback can be found in the experiences of homeless Indigenous men and women, whose displacement and home loss have been largely facilitated by the key institutions in their lives. Significantly, this geography is highly gendered, with homeless men more frequently citing a back-and-forth movement between prison and shelter, while women’s stories convey homeless experiences shaped by social welfare and the apprehension of children by the state.

Research participants described institutionalisation as both psychological and material. For example, in Dara’s experience, institutionalisation occurred through control over her life as she grew from a child to a young adult in residential school. When she became an adult and was permitted to leave the school, she realised she did not have the skills needed to ‘survive in the outside world’, not to mention those required to thrive in her own community:

Residential school ... controlled every aspect of our lives. And then when we become adults, we are told, go, take care of your own place, pay your bills, but we don’t know how. And we don’t know how to be parents because we didn’t grow up watching our own parents. I didn’t know how to sew or cook country food or do those things; I had to learn after I got married, even. When I became a widow, it was so hard for me, because my husband had been very controlling, he’d taken all my pay cheques and had managed all the money. When he died, I didn’t know how to pay the rent, pay the bills. It was so hard for me. I had to deal with a lot of other issues then, too. I started drinking. I drank for eighteen months and then finally I decided to get help for my

family, my friends. My kids wanted me to get better. (Indigenous support provider, Inuvik)

Meanwhile, the material nature of institutionalisation was inscribed through the physical spaces of key institutions in homeless peoples’ lives. For example, residential schools were large, imposing structures, with different communal spaces where children ate, went to class, showered and slept (see de Leeuw 2007). These institutions did not function like a home, but instead in a machine-like fashion, governed by rules and, as described earlier, with the specific mandate to undermine the traditional homes of the children in their care. Similarly, many homeless research participants who had spent time in prison drew close links between their experiences navigating the material space of jail and that of residential school. In an interview with Martha, a support provider in Inuvik and a residential school survivor, she put into words the complex relationship between the materiality of institutionalisation and homelessness in her own experience:

Residential schools were huge institutions. They were huge. Everything was communal—washrooms, dining rooms—and all in these huge rooms. It wasn’t a home, it was an institution. If something broke, the janitor fixed it. You had someone telling you what to do every minute of the day. How do you expect people to relate to having their own house when they never had one before?

This same question was repeated time and again by homeless research participants, and closely mirrored Birdsall-Jones et al.’s (2010: 3) findings in Australia, where homeless Indigenous people ‘emphasized their own life circumstances and how these came into conflict with institutions’. In addition to complicated interactions with residential school, child welfare

and the correctional system, research participants in the NWT case study frequently articulated frustration at the institutional nature of emergency shelters. Like other institutions, emergency shelters are not meant to be 'home', though many research participants had stayed at shelters for periods of up to several years. Shelter clients at the Salvation Army in Yellowknife must be out the door at 8:30 am, allowed back only to have lunch and dinner before finally being permitted to come back to sleep at 9 pm. Clients who are not deemed to be making 'productive choices' towards ending their homelessness sleep on narrow mats crammed together side by side on the shelter floor, while those who are actively seeking employment or pursuing sobriety stay in (slightly) more spacious rooms with bunk beds. A similar sense of institutionalisation, and of being sheltered but not at home, was also described by research participants who had lived in public housing: heavily regulated and scrutinised, and with little privacy, participants spoke of feeling 'under the thumb' of housing staff, who sometimes performed surprise inspections.

While homeless experiences in western societies are in general marked by interactions with social and penal state institutions (see Wacquant 2001), institutionalisation is particularly significant to Indigenous experiences of homelessness. Indigenous homeless people are doubly bound up in institutional geographies—both as Indigenous people, through forms of cultural assimilation and federal governance, and as homeless people. Therefore, the role of institutions in regulating and producing individual geographies of homelessness is, for Indigenous homeless people, located within a broader framework of institutionalisation enacted specifically upon Indigenous peoples.

Conclusion: situating Indigenous homelessness

For many people, they have that pain inside that they haven't dealt with, and it makes it so difficult to hold down a job, to hold down a place to live, to take care of yourself and your family. (Indigenous support provider, Inuvik)

Homelessness among Indigenous people tends to be perceived in two different ways. The first is a somewhat romantic, 'Indigenous-as-nomadic' view that serves to undermine the real significance of material homelessness when one is living on his or her ancestral homelands (see Kearns 2006). The second, and far more common view, however, reduces Indigenous homelessness to simple, material terms, and tightly links that material condition to social pathologies, such as poverty, addiction and poor mental health. The result is a dominant understanding of Indigenous homelessness in settler societies that is entirely *unsituated* (see Jeyaraj 2003) and that views Indigenous homeless experiences solely at the individual scale.

Colonial geographies frame the experiences of homeless Indigenous people (Peters and Robillard 2009), but how do we give adequate attention to the scope and significance of these geographies? Through my own analysis in the Canadian North, I have come to understand Indigenous homelessness as a phenomenon that is multi-scalar, and occurs both collectively (as a community, as a nation) and individually. I have also argued that the experiences of Indigenous homeless people are qualitatively unique in that their homelessness is indelibly linked to (neo)colonial socio-structural dynamics. Furthermore, I have informed the development of culturally appropriate supports for homeless Indigenous people across settler societies (see Coombes, Johnson and Howitt 2012; DeVerteuil and Wilson 2010;

Memcott, Birdsall-Jones and Greenop 2012; Wendt and Gone 2012): understanding Indigenous homelessness as not only a literal experience but also a matter of spiritual homelessness encourages practical approaches to 'home-building' that address both individual and collective needs for self-determination, cultural emplacement and socio-economic inclusion.

Through the case study of rising visible homelessness in two northern Canadian communities, I explored the multi-layered and multi-scalar dimensions of Indigenous homelessness. Material and imaginative geographies of homelessness were intertwined in personal narratives, providing contextualised accounts of 'spiritual homelessness' (Keys Young 1998). Linking to studies in other settler contexts (see Keys Young 1998; Memcott and Chambers 2008), northern Indigenous peoples' experiences of homelessness were rooted in historical and collective experiences, demonstrating the ongoing effects of colonialism on the lives of homeless Indigenous people. The scope of these effects was made clear both in participant accounts of collective trauma as well as the prevalence of intergenerational homelessness.

The particular role of collective experiences in shaping individual homelessness was articulated through narratives of rapid sociocultural change. First, residential school, the child welfare system and other experiences of socio-cultural upheaval threaten family and community ties, core components in 'the Aboriginal home' (Menzies 2009). Second, a sense of detachment from cultural identity, particularly access to the land, displaces Indigenous homeless people from another core component of home. Third, institutionalisation represents a profound loss of independence and also shapes a sense of ontological insecurity and entrapment. Combined, these narratives were used by research participants to both explain their own

personal experiences and also to illustrate the significance and roots of homelessness in the North. Through the biographies of research participants, we witness how fractured relationships to place, both individual and collective, play a fundamental role in guiding Indigenous homeless geographies. These geographies transcend the northern Canadian context to encompass Indigenous homelessness in rural and urban areas across Canada and other settler countries such as the USA, Australia and New Zealand.

As Somerville (1992) argues, to understand homelessness, we must understand home. The elements that have most profoundly shaped northern Indigenous homelessness are those that fracture and delegitimise both material and imaginative elements of home (see Blunt and Dowling 2006; Marston 2004), disrupting a sense of belonging and connection to 'place', and represented through detachments from family, the land and independence. Equally, the transformation of land and cultural modes of spatiality through settlement and housing, the introduction of new social categories of difference, and economic transitions have reoriented many northern Indigenous peoples around foreign modes of sociocultural organisation and paved an uneven material landscape. The colonial past and (neo)colonial present in the Canadian North have thus (re-)produced a social and material landscape of 'collective homelessness with enduring consequences' (Geisler and George 2006: 34); 'enduring consequences' which are driven through policy and discourse, and manifested in the contemporary phenomenon of rising visible homelessness among Indigenous people in the territory's large centres.

Conceptualising these forms of displacement as 'spiritual homelessness' (Keys Young 1998) serves to explain the sociocultural dimensions of Indigenous homelessness as well as the

profound irony of being homeless in one's homeland. Not only does this help to define what it means to situate Indigenous homelessness within a colonial context, but it also demonstrates that the alleviation of Indigenous homelessness requires a two-pronged decolonising agenda: one that aims to specifically address contemporary colonial geographies and their social and material expressions in Indigenous peoples' lives, and at the same time supports individual and collective home-building through culturally rooted, self-determined support frameworks.

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Notes

1. The city of Yellowknife and the town of Inuvik would be considered relatively small urban areas according to the Government of Canada (Statistics Canada 2001). Moreover, Webster (2006) indicates that urbanisation is increasing across the three northern Canadian territories, but most notably in the NWT, particularly in Yellowknife and, to a lesser degree, Inuvik.
2. These numbers do not include hidden homelessness, however, which many support providers believe is much higher, particularly in smaller, more geographically isolated communities. Furthermore, these numbers do not illustrate the rural–urban dynamics that shape northern homelessness, and the ways in which hidden forms of homelessness in rural communities connect to visible homelessness in northern urban centres (see Christensen 2012).
3. This estimate is based on anecdotal reports from support providers working with homeless people in both study communities (see Christensen 2011).
4. In this article, the terms 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal' are used to broadly refer to people of First Nations, Inuit and Métis descent.
5. Indeed, there were a small number of homeless men in both communities who had also spent time in shelters in larger urban centres in the Canadian South, particularly Edmonton, Vancouver and Winnipeg. They all indicated that they had ultimately returned to the North because it was 'easier', and the temptations were seen as being more manageable (i.e. fewer hard drugs). Undoubtedly, there are many men and women unhoused in those three cities who originate from communities in the Canadian North. While this extended pathway certainly merits further inquiry, this was beyond the scope of this particular study.
6. All research interviews and focus groups were recorded through shorthand note-taking, unless a research participant requested otherwise, a decision I made to eliminate some of the intimidation research participants might experience when being recorded. Interview or focus group participants were given \$20 gift certificates to a local grocery store as a gesture of gratitude for their time and contributions.
7. These interview participants also received a \$20 gift certificate for their contributions.
8. The Dene are a First Nations (Athapaskan) people who live in the northern boreal and Arctic regions of Canada.
9. Denendeh means 'land of the people' and refers to the traditional lands of the Dene.
10. The 60s Scoop (Johnston 1983) refers to the Canadian practice from the early 1960s to the late 1980s of apprehending high numbers of Indigenous children and fostering or adopting them out to non-Indigenous families.
11. An Elder is generally defined as someone who possesses spiritual leadership in his/her community and/or Nation. Significantly, an Elder is recognised as such only by his/her respective community or Nation.

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Abstract translations

‘Nuestro hogar, nuestra forma de vida’: la espiritualidad sin hogar y las dimensiones socio-culturales de la carencia de hogar entre los indígenas en los Territorios del Noroeste (TNO) en Canadá

En este artículo examino las dimensiones socio-culturales del hogar y la carencia de hogar entre los indígenas mediante el estudio de la creciente visibilidad de la falta de techo en dos comunidades del norte de Canadá. El presente trabajo se basa en cinco años de trabajo etnográfico entre los indígenas sin vivienda de Yellowknife e Inuvik, dos centros regionales en los Territorios del Noroeste (TNO) en Canadá. Se sugiere que las experiencias indígenas de falta de hogar son simultáneamente colectivas e inmediatas. Con la finalidad de explorar las múltiples escalas en las que los indígenas del norte experimentan la falta de vivienda, utilizo el concepto de ‘falta de vivienda espiritual’ (Keys Young 1998). Participantes en esta investigación destacan varios elementos clave asociados al rápido cambio sociocultural que tienen un efecto importante en el sentido colectivo de hogar y pertenencia y que juegan un rol fundamental en la configuración de las experiencias de los indígenas sin techo. Las narrativas personales de la gente sin vivienda articuladas por los participantes de la investigación están entrelazadas por la exclusión social y material, la ruptura de lazos familiares y comunales, el desapego en términos de identidad cultural, el trauma intergeneracional y la institucionalización. Sostengo que la mitigación de la condición de indígenas sin vivienda en el TNO depende de una agenda decolonizadora que se ocupe específicamente de las geografías coloniales contemporáneas y de sus manifestaciones en instituciones clave en la vida de los indígenas.

Palabras claves: Pueblos indígenas, aborígenes, falta de hogar, vivienda, norte canadiense.