



What is home? Wisdom from *nêhiyawêwin*

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Abstract

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Policies mandated by the Canadian government in its ongoing assimilation project have interrupted the transmission of knowledge and traditional family systems by separating Indigenous peoples from our homes, lands, and languages. This work is concerned with decolonizing western concepts of home and family in Canada through an Indigenous lens, validating Indigenous ways of knowing when it comes to home and housing, and therefore challenging the way Indigenous issues are addressed. We will be utilizing the lexicons of *nêhiyawêwin* (Y-dialect Cree) as a primary source to explore the embedded knowledge within the language. *Nêhiyawêwin* positions women as integral to strong community and family relations, as positioned by traditional matriarchal systems. Indigenous ideas of family are more expansive and broadly defined compared to western worldviews, supporting the circular transmission of oral culture over several generations. To truly understand Indigenous ideas of home, the reader must consider the fluidity of kinship and adoption, as well as what and where home is. This includes a relationship to the land and a spiritual sense of being. With this in mind, we call for Indigenous authority over policy and programming to address Indigenous social issues in Canada. This would allow for Indigenous paradigms to effectively inform policy and housing initiatives that serve Indigenous populations.

Keywords

Home, family, indigenous, *nêhiyawêwin*, matriarchy

Introduction

When addressing social issues such as homelessness, frameworks such as housing first (Gaetz et al., 2013) have resulted in a beneficial paradigm shift in social services' practice but are still steeped in colonial and patriarchal preconceptions. Despite positive change, homelessness continues to rise (Farha & Kaakinen, 2020) with the persistent disproportionate representation of Indigenous people within the homeless population. Indigenous people are eight times more likely to experience homelessness (Belanger et al., 2013) and make up 52.2% of children in care despite being only 7.7% of the national child population (Government of Canada, 2018). This makes apparent the lack of suitable culturally informed services and supports currently available to Indigenous people struggling with housing. Effective policies and programs should be informed by the needs and worldviews of the population it serves. Therefore we present Indigenous worldview, specifically Plains Cree worldview through lived experience and lexicons of *nêhiyanêwin* (the Plains Cree language), to inform future policy decisions. Even though we as authors must use English to communicate our cultural knowledge, it is always in acknowledgment that *nêhiyanêwin* is the source of this knowledge. We specifically focus on discussions surrounding conceptions of home, kinship, community, matriarchy, and connection to the land. In focusing on these discussions, we aim to influence how policymakers, social workers, and those working in Indigenous communities conceptualize Indigenous issues and worldviews.

This topic garners our time and attention as both of us authors identify as Indigenous and have been affected by Canada's legacy of settler colonialism and ensuing historical trauma. Cheyenne is from Muskeg Lake Cree Nation in Saskatchewan, Canada and resides in amiskwaciwâskahikan/Edmonton, Alberta. She has been brought into Indigenous ceremony by the late Elder Roxanne Tootoosis and has the opportunity to gain a traditional Indigenous education and a formal academic education. Cheyenne is in the process of relearning the Cree language and is still in the early stages of reconnecting with her traditional culture. She is working as a youth support worker and researcher for an Indigenous housing organization. Celina is a reconnecting Métis who also lives in amiskwaciwâskahikan with a formal academic background. In the past two years, she has sought to connect to ceremony and culture through the Indigenous community at her university and through her research work, as her family lost their traditional culture and language due to assimilation. Most of Celina's Métis family have passed away, reflecting the legacy of colonization.

In this paper, our reflections on lived experience include relevant oral cultural teachings from Elders in our community. The teachings we present have been received in line with the principles of *kihçéyibtowin*, or respect and reciprocity through the provision of protocol, which is an essential aspect of knowledge transmission that acknowledges the sacredness and value of the knowledge being transmitted. This traditionally includes offerings of tobacco, herbal medicines, and broadcloth prints, but also includes acting sincerely and showing up for our Elders and community when asked. Protocol goes beyond physical gifts and represents the love, adoration, and respect we have for our teachers and Elders. We acknowledge that the knowledge and ideas presented in this work are not our own, but come from language and

cultural experiences transmitted by our Elders and that knowledge itself is not owned by any one individual but by all of creation.

Contextually, Plains Cree territories are situated in Turtle Island, or North America, specifically in what is now the settler colonial nation-state of Canada. Before colonization, Turtle Island was populated by millions of robust nations with complex social organizations, governments, legal structures, and economies. There were between 140 to 160 distinct nations that spoke over a thousand languages, each with their own cultural distinctions and connection to the land (Biscontini, 2019). This is contrary to the European narrative of *terra nullius*, or 'land belonging to no one' (Australians Together, 2021), that characterized the doctrine of discovery¹ and paved the way for settler colonialism. Forming permanent colonies on the land of other nations through dispossession and displacement is an essential aspect of the formation of a settler colonial state (Eidinger & York-Bertram, 2018). This process is not a single event but an ongoing structure that continuously acts to eliminate the previous nation and normalize the legitimacy of the state (Eidinger & York-Bertram, 2018). Post-contact, European colonies brought with them diseases that decimated Indigenous populations (Daschuk, 2013a). Initially, Indigenous relationships between the British, the French, and other European nations were characterized by mutually beneficial trade and commerce, but as the British and French colonies increased settlement and power, Indigenous nations allied themselves with one or the other in competition and conflict over resources (Government of Canada, 2011). When the French colonial effort was defeated by the British, the British began making treaties with Indigenous nations to share the land, but as alliances with Indigenous nations became less advantageous due to ballooning settler populations on limited territory, Indigenous people became an obstacle to colony development (Government of Canada, 2011). This heralded a shift in relationships, where the British colonies and later the Canadian government sought to assimilate and control Indigenous people to gain territory and control of resources through theft and violence such as forced starvation to coerce nations to sign over land (Daschuk, 2013b) and utilizing policies like the Indian Act to disenfranchise Indigenous people from their nations (Bourgeois in Green, 2017). This as well as many policies such as the reserve system, pass system, residential schools, and child welfare system, have wrought genocide upon Indigenous nations, many of which are still in effect today (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2020). Although the Canadian government makes claims of reconciliation, efforts are primarily for publicity and do little to better the reality for Indigenous people (Vega, 2022). Canadian policy has enabled historical trauma and ongoing harm towards Indigenous peoples, and it is unlikely that policy informed by a colonial worldview will provide benefit.

¹ The doctrine of discovery was a philosophy based on decrees given by the pope in the 1400s that touted the superiority of the Christian European race over all other races and religions, and stated that if a land was not populated by Christians it was considered vacant (Joseph, 2020). This dehumanized anyone not of Christian faith and European decent, and has been used to rationalize the dispossession of land and colonization of Indigenous nations (Joseph, 2020). This doctrine was imbedded into Canadian law through the *Royal Proclamation*, which has been and continues to be used to delegitimize Indigenous legal authority and land title in favour of European land title (Pasternak, 2014).

Nêhiyawêwin: cultural understandings within the language

To gain an understanding of the Plains Cree worldview and identity, it is important to start with language. In our tongue, we call the Cree language *nêhiyawêwin*, and it is said to have a spirit of its own when it is spoken. When I (Cheyenne) first started learning from nohkom Roxanne Tootoosis, she explained that morphemes and words are connected to one another, and these connections have stories and teachings of our worldview embedded within them. This is why we approach discussions of Indigenous worldviews surrounding family, patriarchy, home, and kinship with language. As many speakers will tell you, *nêhiyawêwin* is an incredibly descriptive language, enriched with meaning in every syllable, and each element of the language comes with its own teaching and story. Some stories are remembered for survival, others for humor, but many contain knowledge that guides us on how our ancestors lived and how we should live. Beyond that, speaking *nêhiyawêwin* is ‘about a journey inward in order to understand the reality of existence and harmony with nature’ (McKay, M., 2013, p.30).

In reflecting on the understandings and worldviews found within *nêhiyawêwin*, it is pertinent that we acknowledge that the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island are not homogenous, and each group has their own language that shapes and is shaped by their worldview and knowledge, as well as their proximity to and relationship with the land. As an example, in one of our conversations with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack, he noted that the *nêhiyawêwin* words for the months reflect what is occurring in the physical environment at that time. In Y-dialect Cree (Plains Cree), April is *ayikîpîsim*, translated as ‘Frog moon’, as this is a time when the frogs, such as the renowned Wood Frog, thaw out from the cold of winter and start to chirp. Conversely, in Th-dialect Cree (Woodlands Cree) May is considered the Frog Moon. Since Y-dialect is generally spoken in southern plains regions and Th-dialect is spoken in Northern Manitoba, the frogs in their respective regions thaw out at different times during spring, hence the moons have different names even within dialects of the same language. *Nêhiyawêwin* is inherently linked to the land so the people that speak the language also have the same deep relationship to and knowledge of Mother Earth in their respective places.

Indigenous languages have been historically and contemporarily targeted as an assimilation tactic (Wilson, W., 2004). Treaty negotiations in the 1870s were dominated by English which did not contain the heart and connection to the land, causing misinterpretation of treaties. Indigenous conceptions of treaty were understood to share and take care of the land, whereas settler interpretations focused on land ownership and division. The Indian Act banned speaking Indigenous languages as the Canadian Government recognized the power of language to transmit culture (Wilson, W., 2004). When attending residential schools, speaking a native language was met with severe punishment such as beating and humiliation. Throughout the generations, many Indigenous groups have faced the threat and realization of language extinction. The effects within families were seen quickly; older generations were not able to communicate with their children and grandchildren. Our traditional stories were being told less and less as the transmission of knowledge through oral culture and language became more difficult. In *Learning to be a*

Nêhiyaw Through Language, Belinda Daniels-Fiss reflects how English was reinforced as her first language, even though her grandparents spoke Cree fluently (2008). Her grandparents were conditioned in residential schools to suppress their Cree language, so rather than pass it on, they emphasized English to spare their children from the harm they endured. Colonization cemented the idea that to succeed, one must speak English. In this way, our languages and cultural knowledge were pushed into hiding. This resulted in a loss of cultural literacy among many of our people (Daniels-Fiss, B., 2008).

As authors, we have both felt the impacts of language assimilation. Celina's family lost their traditional language altogether, and Celina is working to rekindle that knowledge through her research work. Cheyenne's experience is of rekindling the culture that was cemented into her subconscious as an infant but was subsequently buried by colonial parenting and education. In Cheyenne's direct family line, *nêhiyawêwin* was last fluently spoken four generations ago due to her family's attendance at residential schools before the 1960s. Even though much of the language was lost within her family, there were still some who persisted and followed a traditional path, maintaining their stories and language. Cheyenne has been able to reconnect to culture and ceremony by surrounding herself with those that make efforts to keep *nêhiyawêwin* alive for future generations. We understand that for many of us that have been separated from our communities, the way back to our traditional family systems and homes starts by reclaiming our Indigenous languages. The knowledge within our languages provides us with a template for how to structure ourselves and our relationships in the ways of our ancestors. Language revitalization is a representation of how resilient Indigenous people are and how we are determined to keep our culture alive. In this paper, we will continue to use language as evidence of our traditions. In this sense, the language *nêhiyawêwin* is our first source of knowledge.

Home, Community, and Indigenous Matriarchy

Before colonial contact, Cree women held important roles in the community and had significantly more political power. Joyce Green states that 'women in most Indigenous nations historically enjoyed far more respect, power, and autonomy' than settler women (2017, p. 10). Women led ceremonies, were healers, spoke for their communities as decision-makers, and raised the younger generation (Posca, E., 2020). Cree kinship ties are matrilineal and societies were matriarchal. Matriarchy is a comprehensive societal structure that prescribes more equitable values and roles within the community. Instead of the hierarchical power structure that values male domination found in patriarchy, matriarchy involves equal relationships between genders and all living things (Green, J., 2017; Posca, E., 2020). Through matriarchy, we are taught that we all have a communal responsibility to each other and the land because of our interconnection and relation to one another (R.Tootoosis, personal conversation). This concept is built into many of our teachings. We believe that we must live in harmony together, both as people and within our ecosystems, including with our four-legged relatives, the water beings, and mother earth. Although there were societal roles that were informed by gender, gender and gender roles in traditional Indigenous systems were much more fluid than the western binary (Wilson, A., 1996). We can inform this from

our language, as *néhiyawéwin* does not contain gendered language or pronouns (R. Tootoosis and F. Whiskeyjack, personal conversation). As long as one upheld a community role, they were valid despite their sex or gender.

An oral story transmitted by our late Elder Roxanne Tootoosis elucidates a significant interaction between the matriarchal and patriarchal systems when the Jesuit missionaries made contact with Indigenous people, which has purportedly been confirmed by historical findings of Jesuit diaries:

When the Jesuits first attempted to convert Indigenous peoples to Christian faith, they first focused their efforts on the men. The Jesuits assumed that by converting the men, the entire village would follow suit because they believed the men to be the head of the communities. Matriarchy and matrilineal bloodlines were foreign ideas to the Jesuits. Their initial efforts were not successful at converting the whole community, because women held positions of power. After failing to convert the women of their own volition, they introduced patriarchal ideas to the Indigenous men and taught them that women should be subjugated as settler women were. The Jesuits introduced the practice of the rule of thumb that encouraged men to beat their women and children with a stick no wider than their thumb if they disobeyed them (Shapiro, 1998; Turner, 1993). This served to integrate colonial and patriarchal violence into Indigenous communities. This assimilation tactic served to uproot Indigenous matriarchal systems and strip women of their political and societal power in their communities.²

The example of the Jesuits shows how unfamiliar and threatening matriarchal worldviews are to colonial thinking. By challenging patriarchy through this lens, we uplift Indigenous women and demonstrate the many ways that colonization has attacked Indigenous values and traditions of home and family by subjugating Indigenous people, particularly women, to patriarchy. Since the introduction of patriarchy and colonization, Indigenous women have suffered the most out of any demographic (Green, 2017). Over the last few decades, Indigenous women have been over-represented in the unhoused and incarcerated populations, are at higher risk of poverty, and have a higher statistical probability of interacting with Child and Family Service (CFS) (Green, 2017). When working within fields that provide services to Indigenous women, it is beneficial to practice matriarchy by making space for women to empower themselves.

To elucidate women's societal role in the Indigenous matriarchal systems, we look to the related words in the Cree language *néhiyawéwin*. Elder Roxanne Tootoosis taught that women are the heart of the home, because the start of the family begins within a woman's body, something *okâwîmâwak* (mothers) share with *okâwîmâw-askîj* (mother-earth). This relationship between the earth and her women is foundational to the Cree way of thinking and is entwined with the understanding of home on the land and women's innate connection to *okâwîmâw-askîj*. In *néhiyawéwin*, *iskotêw* (fire) is a sacred and living being that brings life, food, and sustenance. The related word is *iskwêw* (woman), demonstrating how in a spiritual

² This teaching is recalled from an oral teaching between Cheyenne Greyeyes and the late Elder Roxanne Tootoosis.

sense, women and fire are relatives. In a physical sense, Cree people believe that a woman's ability to have children was because she has been given a piece of the sacred fire (R. Tootoosis, personal conversation). Those spiritual teachings influence our practical roles as well: it was a woman's job to keep the family fire or the homefire going, for heat and food. Before contact, there was always fire at the center of the tipi (traditional dwelling) representing how matriarchy is a representation of women's central place in the family (R. Tootoosis, personal conversation). In *nêhiyawêwin*, how we say 'my home' is *nîkîhk* which is directly related to another word for 'my mother': *nîkâwîy*. Centering women in the home in a matriarchal way is to say that she is the head of the household and holds the most weight when it comes to decision making, rather than only being responsible for domestic life as in the patriarchal understanding.

As a side note, we would like to acknowledge that the English language inherently lends itself to binary language and at face value excludes Two-Spirit people. Two-Spirit was a term adopted in the 1990s meant to represent queer, transgender, and gender non-conforming Indigenous people (Wilson, A., 1996). For many Indigenous people, Two-Spirit people are the balance of both the male and female energies, but those teachings vary from nation to nation and Elder to Elder (âpihtawikosisân, 2012; Wilson, A., 1996; Tallbear & Willey, 2019). The recent adoption of this term hints at how traditionally our communities were unconcerned with identity expression as a prerequisite for community social roles and family structure (Wilson, A., 1996). Gender is a colonial structure, and with that in mind, we have chosen the term homefire keepers to refer to the individuals that are the center of the home, often the life-givers, which is a role associated with femininity but not exclusive to gender. Similarly, 'women's teachings' do not necessarily reflect exclusion based on gender but reflect teachings of the divine feminine.

Our child-rearing practices are also grounded in upholding treaty. There is a common saying here in Treaty 6 (colonially known as Alberta and Saskatchewan) stated by Alexander Morris, the Commissioner of Treaty 6: as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the river flows, the treaty stands (Team ReconciliAction YEG, n.d.). The flowing river is a representation of birthing, and as long as labor waters break on Indigenous traditional land, and Indigenous people continue to build communities, then the treaties will be upheld (R. Tootoosis, personal conversation). In an Indigenous way of thinking, it is the women and the homefire keepers that keep old treaties alive, because they are often a child's first interaction with culture and language (R. Tootoosis, personal conversation). While it is not the sole responsibility of women and homefire keepers to raise children, Indigenous communities recognize that is the most important community role, and raising children embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing is a key component to keeping teachings and the way of life alive.

Throughout this paper, we have made a conscious effort not to dominate the discussion with the deficits and problems that colonization caused so that the positivity of Indigenous teachings and way of life can shine. However, it is important to understand how colonization-specifically patriarchy- has affected Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people. Before 1982, Indian status was only passed on through the male line as stated in the Indian Act (Bourgeois

in Green, 2017), which is counterintuitive to the matrilineal Indigenous worldview (StarBlanket in Green, 2017). Indigenous women lost status for marrying out, and subsequently, their children would lose status, therefore, disenfranchising countless people who are legally Indigenous by Indigenous law (Bourgeois in Green, 2017).

Colonization and patriarchy also greatly impacted midwifery, one of the few trades that Indigenous women were respected for in settler communities. When settlers first came west, giving birth was one of the most dangerous tasks a settler woman could perform (Kaler, 2016). Indigenous midwives were highly skilled and esteemed within their communities, and extended their services to the settler women, saving many from death. However, Indigenous midwifery was banned due to patriarchal values (Cidro et al., 2020) and to make way for western medicine. The knowledge and teachings of these Indigenous midwives could no longer be passed down to the new mothers, again disconnecting specifically Indigenous women from their cultural practices and teachings surrounding childbirth (Finestone & Stirbys, 2017).

Not only have Indigenous parents been subjected to colonial systems, but so too have their new babies. To this day, the Canadian government issues birth alerts on Indigenous mothers deemed unfit, and only in the last few years has legislation addressed the practice in some provinces, but not all (Paynter et al., 2022). Once an Indigenous person goes into labour, CFS is informed so that the child can be apprehended before the family leaves the hospital (Buller et al., 2019). The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls concluded that 'Birth alerts are racist and discriminatory and are a gross violation of the rights of the child, the mother and the community' (Buller et al., 2019, p. 355). Birth alerts are an ongoing assimilation tactic targeting Indigenous women as this serves to disintegrate Indigenous families by disconnecting children from their families.

Decolonizing thinking around family means to remove ideas of power, hierarchy, and gender roles and recognize how often we as individuals simply accept patriarchy as something that has always been rather than something that has been unnaturally enforced. Indigenous matriarchy isn't just for the empowerment of Indigenous homefire keepers, but to reject the ways colonization has embedded structures like patriarchy into our social makeup, which continues to impact concepts and manifestations of home and family. To begin to counter the negative deficits caused by colonization, we can look back to how Indigenous families were built and what values they embodied to give us a way to rebuild our families and communities.

Nêhiyaw Family Structure and Kinship

When we consider home and family, there are differences in who that includes depending on which cultural lens is being used. Not only are *nêhiyaw* families matrilineal and matriarchal, but they also are non-exclusionary (Kainai Board of Education, 2004). Many Indigenous people do not have terms that separate immediate family from extended family in the same way as the western culture, and the lines between who is in your immediate family are blurry (Tam et al., 2017). Cree conception of immediate family is much broader

and can include those that are not directly related by bloodlines, such as family friends and adopted relatives (Kainai Board of Education, 2004; Tam et al., 2017).

In Cheyenne’s University Cree language class, they spent a week learning the different kinship terms outlined in the family network. The depth of knowledge within this topic is beyond the scope of this paper but a brief introduction will support an understanding of *néhiyaw* familial structure. As mentioned before, *nikáwiy* means mother and is connected to the idea of home. *Nikáwís* is the term for maternal aunt, literally meaning ‘little mother’ (F. Whiskeyjack, personal conversation). This example shows how there is less distinction between Cree immediate families and our aunts, uncles, and cousins. Looking at the graphic below (Fig. 1, level 2), aunt and uncle extended family terms are all related to the parental terms. On the third level of the diagram, cousin terms are identical to our sibling familial titles. Aunts and uncles are regarded similarly to parents, which emphasizes the idea that children are raised by the entire family, a phenomenon that western nuclear families aren’t commonly familiar with. Benita Tam’s *Indigenous families: who do you call family?* puts it simply: Indigenous families are unique because of ‘our cultural kinship systems and higher mobility’ (2017, p. 245). This means that child rearing is distributed among family members and that knowledge transmission to the child comes from many sources within the family rather than just the parents.

The western perspective on home and housing does not account for this type of parenting or family structure. In the western tradition, the nuclear family is favoured where the parents are their children's sole providers and raisers, which devalues single parents and multigenerational homes that are common to Indigenous families (Tam et al., 2017). This becomes important as CFS does not consider Indigenous kinship systems, but rather western definitions of family while enacting its services (McKay, C., 2018). These contradictory worldviews have resulted in children being removed from the home. For example, Mary

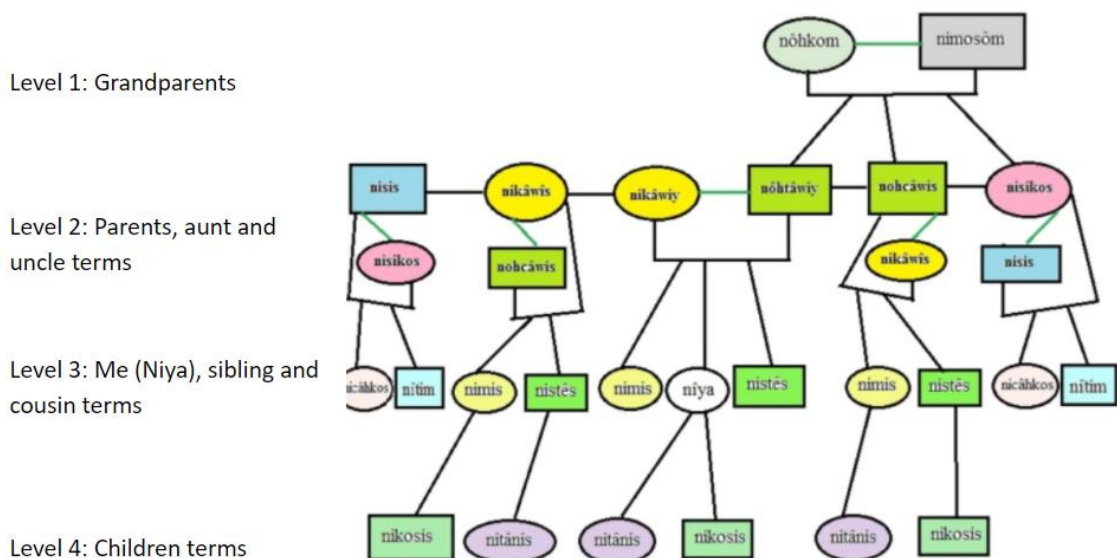


Figure 1

How the Cree language identifies members of families is dependent on which side of the family you are from and the relationship. SPURCE: Vowel, 2011.

Burton notes that her children were taken away by CFS while her mother was helping her care for them as she was completing her education (Bergen, 2021). This shows that CFS considers single parents who cannot maintain sole parenting duties as unsuitable and does not consider Indigenous kinship systems a viable parenting framework. For this reason, nations such as Carcross Tagish First Nation in the Yukon have begun to implement their own child services that take this into consideration (McKay, C., 2018).

Cheyenne's kokom Doris Greeyes explains that Cree people view children as not belonging to the parents, rather they belong to the land and they are on loan from *kisê-maniton*, or Creator (personal communication). With this in mind, the responsibility for raising children falls to the entire community (R. Tootoosis, personal conversation). When a parent needs help, other family members or folks in the community would traditionally step in. It is a paternalistic and colonial assumption that the state can raise our children better than our communities. This family structure facilitates oral transmission of generational knowledge, especially between children and Elders in the community. Cree homes are built to facilitate this relationship, with traditional homes being multigenerational. The bond between grandchild and grandparent is one of the strongest and is reflected in *nêhiyawêwin* by both terms for grandparent and grandchild being the same, *chapan*. Socialization and traditional culture transmission are built into the communal parenting structure so that each member of the family brings a unique perspective when teaching the younger generation.

As mentioned earlier, *nêhiyaw* family structures are non-exclusionary. Cree family structure also considers the notion of adoption to be much more natural and ubiquitous compared to western culture and does not make the distinction between 'adopted family' and 'natural family'. In Cheyenne's personal experience, once you have made significant relationships with an Indigenous family, you are considered family regardless of who you are and where you were born. When a Cree person claims you as family, that bond is unquestionable, and you are accepted into the community (Tam et al., 2017). There is an abundance of historical accounts that exemplify Indigenous adoption culture. Adoption is widely practiced between families and Indigenous nations. For example, one of our famous Cree leaders, *Pîhtokabânâpîwîjîn* (Chief Poundmaker), was adopted and raised by the Blackfoot leader, *Isapo-muxika* (Chief Crowfoot, Blackfoot translation) and later returned to lead his tribe as Chief (personal conversation, R. Tootoosis). Mixing family ties fostered peace between the two communities of Blackfoot and Cree people, and exemplified the principle of *wâhkôhtowin*, or that we are all related.

Indigenous adoption is distinctly different from the violent systems of adoption imposed on Indigenous people by the Canadian government, which serves to separate and disconnect our families rather than expand and connect them. During the majority of the 20th century, First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people of Turtle Island were victims of the 60s scoop. The Canadian government separated families by stealing our children through adoption to non-Indigenous families (Thompson, 2021). Children were sent far from their homes, sometimes to entirely different countries, disconnected from their language, culture, and their traditional lands (Baswan & Yenilmez, 2022). Babies stolen for adoption were advertised in papers, sometimes with a price tag attached, equating the children to bought

slaves (Carreiro, 2016). Many who survived the 60s scoop had little to no understanding of their history and some were even unaware that they were Indigenous. This created generational rifts and lapses in traditional knowledge transmission that constituted nothing short of cultural genocide.

This recent history shows why Indigenous peoples hold significant distrust of government agencies such as CFS. Indigenous adoption culture remains strong today because nations understand the importance of keeping our children out of the CFS system and believe that it is integral for children to remain within their families, communities, and culture to maintain their sense of self and identity. That being said, we call for Indigenous authority over child and family services for their given nation to prevent the ongoing harm and cultural genocide that occurs by the Canadian government forcing Indigenous nations to conform to western paradigms surrounding home and family.

The Land is our Home

Differing worldviews surrounding land ownership and objectives to secure land when treaty was being signed resulted in settlers breaking treaties in the name of gaining territory. This dispossessed Indigenous people from their territories and has resulted in a disproportionate number of Indigenous peoples losing their home. The reserves that Indigenous people were funnelled into were tracts of land that were not centrally located and generally lacked natural resources and farmable land, resulting in less ability for communities to sustain themselves and participate in the economy (Wilson, K., & Hodgson, 2018). Like the case of the Papaschase First Nation, reserve lands were sometimes annulled or moved elsewhere if the land was later desired for settler territory, forcing communities to be uprooted over and over again (Shields et al., 2020). This forced many to relocate to urban centers as they are unable to meet their needs on reserve. The lack of stable territory and the legacy of historical trauma from the Canadian government's assimilation efforts have increased poverty and incarceration, creating a pipeline of Indigenous people entering homelessness in urban centers (Thistle, 2017).

We often hear the term 'homelessness' within the housing sector to refer to a state of living without a roof over your head or rooflessness. This connotation infers the western idea of home being a stable, physical structure and equates being at home to a state of habituation in commodified housing. This understanding misses the mark for Indigenous peoples who are disproportionately represented in the homeless sector. The sense of place and being at home encompasses much more than having a house to live in, and sometimes a physical structure does not represent home at all, such as for nomadic tribes. A more comprehensive understanding of home can be found when considering the term 'rootedness'. This meaning implies a connection between a sense of place and identity, security, and way of being (Somerville, 1992).

For Indigenous peoples, the meaning of being rooted and at home encapsulates a connection to our Indigeneity, including to our ancestors, languages, traditions, family, community, land, medicines, and ceremonies, as well as an interconnectedness with all of

creation, reflected in the principle of *mijowâhkôhtowin* (Thistle, 2017). *Wâhkôhtowin* is roughly translated into ‘kinship relations’, but also means being in reciprocity with the spirit within all of existence, including the plants, animals, water, land, and other humans (Wildcat, 2018). Elder Maria Campbell reflects that ‘All of creation is related and inter-connected to all things within it’ and that *wâhkôhtowin* means ‘honoring and respecting those relationships’ (Campbell in Wildcat, 2018, p.14). The prefix ‘*mijo-*’, translated as good, well, beautifully (Itwêmina, 2019), conveys that these practices of relationality should be done in a good or beautiful way, or with good intention. To be in reciprocity means that your relationships are balanced and that you take only what you need and give equally. Therefore, a sense of home for Indigenous people is inextricably tied to relationships with nature.

When considering home for Indigenous people, it is important to note that our cultures are formed around a relationship to the land rather than the permanence of a physical structure. My (Cheyenne) Plains Cree ancestors were nomads that moved with the bison, moose, and other relatives. We followed our four-legged relatives across the vastness of this island. We fasted where the faces of our ancestors are etched into the mountain. We drank from sacred streams that have sustained us for thousands of years. We listened to *yotin* (the wind) howl against the trees. How can I even begin to imagine the millions of moccasins that have danced alongside the sweetgrass? Imagine walking down a path that your ancestors have walked, their voices echoing in the memory of your blood. The sweet smell of medicine fills your lungs, reminding you that the land always provides. They tell us that when we are buried, we return to our original mother’s womb, back into the ground. Our matriarchal teachings show us that a piece of the earth and fire is in each and every one of us. Indigenous peoples cannot be separated from *okâwîmân-aski* (Mother earth). Cheyenne’s personal reflection aims to demonstrate the feeling of being connected to the land and the comfort and familiarity involved in this connection, which has been experienced by many Indigenous people despite efforts to disconnect us.

Between first contact and when treaties were signed, the emerging governance structures came to understand the difficulty of controlling people if they did not maintain a constant location. Nomadic lifestyles sought to work with nature rather than against it, and historically Plains Cree were encouraged from a young age to live off the land. This differs greatly from the settler mentality that considered the wilderness with fear and danger (Cronon, 1995). The settlers equated Indigenous peoples to animals for their ability and desire to live on the land rather than in permanent structures. The reserve and pass system restricted nations from their nomadic lifestyles. As Indigenous identity is grounded in a relationship to the land, this break results in feelings of rootlessness and disconnection with our identities. To regain our home is to rekindle the connection to the land and all of nature within it.

Conclusion

This work has demonstrated how Indigenous and Cree worldview is distinct from western colonial and patriarchal understandings of home and family, and how these ways of

being were interrupted by the colonial legacy of Canada. This history provides the context for issues of Indigenous homelessness and poverty today as the Canadian government has targeted Indigenous women, children, language, culture, and lands for generations, which in our opinion delegitimizes their authority over housing policy concerning our communities. Attempts to box solutions to Indigenous issues within colonial worldviews and policy have been unfruitful, and policy for Indigenous peoples must be positioned within Indigenous worldviews and knowledge. The deep rifts systematically created between Indigenous peoples and their connection to identity and lands must be repaired. This work must be done by and for Indigenous people, with reparations and funding from the state. Indigenous-led housing programs have begun to address this by featuring multigenerational buildings and cultural supports (Dickson, 2020; Niginan Housing Ventures, 2021). Notably, these housing structures are still located within colonial systems in terms of operation and funding, and it would be beneficial to see such programs on traditional and urban reserves where the nation has control over these aspects. These efforts must be expanded to become accessible to more localities and nations. Further solutions include advancing Indigenous sovereignty, giving back traditional lands for Indigenous resettlement, and securing traditional foods and resources with comprehensive environmental policy. Further efforts to decolonize housing policy and urban studies and bring them in line with Indigenous knowledge are needed to address Indigenous homelessness.

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