

**THE WAITING GAME: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FIRST NATIONS
WHO ARE WAITING FOR HOUSING TO DETERMINE APPROPRIATE POLICY AND
PLANNING DIRECTIONS**

By

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THE WAITING GAME: EXPLORING THE INTERIM EXPERIENCES OF FIRST NATIONS WAITING FOR HOUSING

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ABSTRACT:

This Major Research Paper explores the lived experiences of Eabametoong and Nibinamik First Nations members while they wait for housing to determine how planning and policy can better address the challenges they identify. This period that can reach 10 years is marked with uncertainty and increased stress that negatively impacts quality of life, promotes overcrowding, and results in many members leaving their reserves. Understanding the impacts of waiting has not been studied in a First Nations context. The work of Oldfield and Greyling (2015) on waiting for housing in post- apartheid South Africa serves as a framework in which to analyze the lived experiences of Canada's First Nations while they also wait for housing due to similar colonial pasts. As such, this paper presents waiting as the product of political inaction, and therefore a policy direction in its own right.

KEY WORDS: "housing" "Waiting", "grey space", "overcrowding", "mobility", "First Nations", "Indigenous"

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1.0 Introduction

The housing shortage facing Canada's First Nations is worsening. In 2001, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) estimated a housing shortage of 8 500 units on-reserves. Ten years later, it identified that 20 000 to 35 000 homes were needed to meet the demand (Office of the Auditor General, 2003,17; Office of the Auditor General, 2011). The Assembly of First Nations estimates that by 2031, there will be a backlog of 130 000 units on-reserves, a staggering number that results in overcrowded living conditions and an increased deterioration of houses that negatively impact the well-being of First Nations (Assembly of First Nations, 2013). This number does not even account for the future need on-reserves, estimated at 14 000 units annually (Peters & Robillard, 2009, p.656). Conversely, the urban Indigenous population is one of the fastest growing populations in Canada with 56% of the Indigenous population living in urban centres, an increase of 7% from 1996 (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2016).

This growth adds increased pressures on service provision in cities, particularly when 1 in 15 urban Indigenous peoples are homeless, compared to the 1 in 236 of the non-indigenous population (Homeless Hub, 2017). These statistics vividly illustrate the housing crisis both on and off-reserves and suggest that many First Nations peoples are waiting for adequate and appropriate homes.

In their study of post-apartheid South Africa, Oldfield and Greyling (2015) employ the experience of waiting as "an analytical terrain in which to reflect on postcolonial states" (p.1102). They describe waiting as a feeling of "permanent temporariness" that citizens navigate prior to obtaining a state-provided home (p.1102). It is within this space where the relations between the public and the government come to fruition. While waiting for housing, citizens create informal housing options that

subvert bureaucratic processes. Yiftachel (2009), defines waiting as essentially “grey spacing” or “the practice of indefinitely positioning populations between the ‘lightness’ of legality, safety, and full membership, and the ‘darkness’ of eviction, destruction and death” (p.240). It also “refers to developments, enclaves, populations and transactions positioned between this light and dark dichotomy (p.243). The apartheid regime in South Africa presented similarities to Canada’s reserve systems, as both programs segregated certain populations and reduced their rights, presenting analytical terrains in which to explore the implications of waiting (DuCharme,1986).

The effects of waiting for housing have not been deeply explored in a Canadian, let alone First Nations context. This is problematic as waiting for housing can last anywhere from 3 to 10 years, during which time a household’s needs may change. A lack of housing on-reserves may not support these transitions, which could inhibit the ability a household to evolve, increasing levels of stress as a result of uncertainty and precarious interim living situations. The lack of housing options may also push community members off-reserves into urban centres where it can be difficult to maintain community and cultural ties (Clatworthy,1980; 2013).

Housing is considered a social determinant of health as it can greatly influence and impact quality of life (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009). The conditions that emerge as a result of waiting, such as overcrowding and movement off-reserves, negatively contribute to physical and mental health of Indigenous peoples, with First Nation youth 5 to 6 times more likely to die by suicide in comparison non-Indigenous youth (Advisory Group on Suicide Prevention & Assembly of First Nations, 2003). The limited academic literature that explicitly focuses on these lived experiences of First Nations peoples who are in want and in need of housing reveals a large gap about what

is being done to support households or individuals while they wait for a home.

Housing is not being provided at the pace in which it is needed, and to the degree to which it was promised by the Canadian federal government (Assembly of First Nations, 2013; Peters and Robillard, 2009; Office of the Auditor General, 2003, 17; Office of the Auditor General, 2011; Beedy). McCartney (2016) notes how, “[t]he housing crisis facing Canada’s Indigenous population is the physical manifestation of the continued implementation of assimilative policies of Canada’s federal government” (p. 21). Waiting for housing is an extension of this manifestation. It suggests that by historically failing to meet its promises in housing provision, complemented by policies that diminish the capacity of First Nations to address their own housing needs, the government is allowing the phenomenon of waiting to continue. This lens presents waiting as a policy direction in its own right because it is a product of government inaction to appropriately address the housing crisis. Understanding the implications of waiting for a home is important to understanding the significant impact inappropriate housing can have on First Nations peoples. The use of waiting as a theoretical framework with which to explore the lived experiences of Eabametoong and Nibinamik First Nations generated from the *Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together* project, presents waiting as the experience of overcrowding, as the factor driving out-migration from reserves, and as the product of failed policies to intended to dispossess First Nations peoples living in what is now called Canada. These experiences begin to inform larger discussions surrounding waiting as an analytical terrain for understanding the lived experiences of First Nations during this period.

Through an exploration of the contextual framework and literature surrounding waiting and First Nations peoples, this paper explores how waiting appears as a form of protest against the government’s assimilative agenda, signaling how planning practice

and policy must be changed to ensure the sustained continuation of First Nations communities and cultures in Canada's rural and urban landscapes. In South Africa, the protest in response to lack of political action emerges in the informality of houses built in undesignated locations. In Canada, I argue this protest appears in the fierce desire of many First Nations to remain connected to their lands and communities.

By viewing housing inadequacies through this in-between lens, where political inaction appears as a purposeful choice, this paper infers planning strategies and policy directions from the narrative experiences that could aid in mitigating the challenges First Nations members face while waiting for housing. These recommendations privilege the Indigenous worldview and contribute to the goal of Indigenous planning to alleviate the oppression of these distinctive groups that result from the assertion of a colonial worldview on First Nations peoples.

2.0. Methodology and Research Questions

The methodological approach of this paper is a literature review of existing academic work and professional reports to understand the theoretical and political context surrounding the experience of waiting to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the lived experiences of Eabametoong and Nibinamik First Nations members while they wait for housing?
- 2) How do these conditions contribute to the out migration from reserves?
- 3) What services are available in Thunder Bay to help mitigate possible challenges community members living off-reserve face while they wait and what is the impact of this population on service provision?

In order to begin answering these questions, I employ a theoretical framework based on Oldfield and Greyling's (2015) discussion of waiting, as well as other theorists that inform their definition. Through a snowballing process, I was able to explore existing literature surrounding housing on-reserves and in urban centres that present the larger themes that frame this experience of waiting. These include the challenges associated with housing conditions in both settings, the implications of housing shortages on mobility patterns, and the incorporation of lived experiences as a tool to better understand the interim experiences of those waiting for housing. As such, woven within this methodological approach is the acknowledgement of the importance of story-telling as an indigenous research method: "[s]tory is a practice in Indigenous cultures that sustains communities, validates experiences and epistemologies, expresses experiences of Indigenous peoples, and nurtures relationships and the sharing of knowledge (Iseke, 2013).

In this vein, the narratives of Eabametoong and Nibinamik community members reveal the challenges many First Nations face while they wait for housing, and highlight their views on what needs to be done to mitigate them. If waiting for housing is commonplace and

enduring, then directions moving forward should focus on the phenomenon of waiting both in terms of its meaning, and in its performance that pervades the everyday lives of First Nations peoples living in what is now called Canada.

3.0 Colonial Context of Waiting

The following section provides a contextual overview on the historical factors that led to the current housing crisis facing First Nations peoples, highlighting how the promises of key legislative documents that have not been kept.

3.1 Defining First Nations

This paper focuses on First Nations living in what is now called Canada. These populations are one of three Indigenous groups along with the Metis and Inuit peoples. First Nations peoples were originally defined as “Status Indians” under the *Indian Act* in 1876. The new federal government post-confederation created strict guidelines for what constitutes having “Indian” status, and allowed parameters wherein this status can be revoked (Vowel, 2016). Despite the difference between First Nations peoples, these groups share similar histories due to their association with the *Indian Act*. This document played a key role in the forced assimilation of First Nations peoples into the larger settler society, the effects of which are still evident on reserves in terms of housing conditions and societal challenges. Some of these include family tensions as a result of overcrowding, in addition to cultural disconnectedness if First Nations members move into urban centres (Porter, 1993; Buckley, 2012).

3.2 The Indian Act and Housing

The waiting game begins with the *1876 Indian Act*, a legislative document that separated First Nations peoples from their lands, moving them to the least agriculturally viable areas, on reserves that the federal government intended to service and provide with resources (*Indian Act*, 1876). Within the regulations are clear statements that make the federal government responsible for the provision of housing on reserves. Section 73 (1) of the *Indian Act* states that, The Governor in Council may make regulations... (i) to provide for the inspection of premises on reserves and the destruction, alternation or renovation thereof; (j) to prevent the overcrowding of premises on reserves used as dwellings; (k) to provide for sanitary conditions in private premises on reserves as well as in public places on reserves; (l) for the construction and maintenance of boundary fences; and (m) for empowering and authorizing the council of a band to borrow money for band projects or housing purposes and providing for the making of loans

out of moneys so borrowed to members of the band for housing purposes (Indian Act, 1876 p.47).

These conditions highlight the restrictive and regressive nature of the *Indian Act*, an iteration of which is still in use today. The contemporary housing crisis on reserves directly contrasts each of these clauses, which suggests that promises have not been kept, a pervasive theme throughout the waiting game.

3.3 The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

In light of the repercussions of the *Indian Act*, the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that Aboriginal peoples should become responsible for their own housing needs by strengthening their economic base, highlighting how “on reserves, more than 39.2% of residents’ needs in housing were not being met and that 12.9% of residents were on waiting lists” (Peters & Robillard, 2009, p.656). This report also suggested the federal government should provide resources to ensure that these needs are met moving forward (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Therefore, while the *Indian Act* enables the governing council to establish regulations to support Indigenous housing, the 1996 Royal Commission recommends that more must be done by the community themselves and instead supported by governmental efforts, rather than relied upon entirely. This recognition of the need for community driven efforts implicates the experience of waiting because it recognizes the failures of the *Indian Act* and proposes a new direction for policies. The socio-economic damage caused by the *Indian Act*, however, had already been done, as the legislation resulted in 50 years of traditional building ability and history amongst First Nations to become lost, further evident in the number of First Nations community members who are now waiting for housing due to this engineered dependency. The 1996 Royal Commission describes how “First Nations people both on- and off-reserve place a high value on the reserve as a refuge from non-Aboriginal society, a place where the bonds of community are strong and where Aboriginal culture and identity can be learned and reinforced” (Peters & Robillard, 2009, p.656; Leslie &

Maguire, 1979). While not applicable to all communities, the tradeoffs that occur while First Nations members wait for housing, for example overcrowding, are symbolic of the desire of many to remain living on reserves despite colonial legacies and broken promises.

3.4 Colonial Reverberations

The impacts of the *Indian Act* and colonial ideologies continue to disadvantage First Nations. An UN report on the situation of indigenous peoples in Canada reveals, “of the bottom 100 Canadian communities on the Community Well-Being Index, 96 are First Nations and only one First Nation community is in the top 100” (Anaya 2014, p.7). The damaging historical treatment of this diverse group by the Canadian government, as evident with the creation of reserves and subversive land treaty agreements, as well as with the establishment of the residential school system, created environments wherein First Nations populations are unable to assert their respective worldviews in regards to their land or their living conditions (Buckley, 1992; Carter, 1993). The housing inadequacies on First Nations reserves are therefore rooted in and perpetrated by these colonial legacies entrenched in legislation and the top-down nature of planning practice.

4.0 Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

4.1 Waiting in Canada

The contextual overview presents the legislative framework of the waiting game for Canada's First Nations, however, the implications of waiting have not been studied academically in-depth. Oldfield and Greyling's (2015) research on waiting for housing in South Africa post-apartheid serves as a backbone upon which to analyze the impacts of waiting on First Nations communities. Their work is one of the first explorations into the living situations that emerge while citizens wait for state provided housing, presenting waiting as "an analytical terrain in which to reflect on postcolonial states" (p.1102). The review of existing academic literature surrounding First Nations housing in Canada more generally presents key arguments regarding the preconditions that led to waiting on-reserves, as well as in urban centres. A large body of literature also examines the factors that influence the mobility patterns of First Nations peoples, presenting these movements as directly connected to the availability of housing options. Grey literature alludes to the interim experiences of community members who are waiting for homes, yet there is a gap in academic literature that incorporates these lived experiences, an omission of key information that could make planning decisions more meaningful and collaborative. This is problematic because understanding the needs, the living circumstances, and the experiences of those waiting is crucial to developing solutions to this phenomenon that leaves people feeling insecure, uncomfortable, and unable to move forward with their lives. The application of waiting as a theoretical framework to reflect upon these experiences also highlights the failures of *the Indian Act* and governmental processes, presenting waiting as a housing policy in and of itself.

4.1.1 On- Reserves

Academic literature analyzes the conditions that help inform the current situation of First Nations living on-reserves, however, it does not discuss these conditions through a waiting lens.

Reserves were intended as a temporary measure to isolate First Nations and ultimately enable them to assimilate into the settler culture. Overtime, however, these areas became enclaves for Indigenous cultures and where many First Nations want to live (Gottfriedson, 2013; Peters, 2003; Leslie & Maguire, 1979). Unlike other housing initiatives across the country, the servicing of reserves and housing provision is the sole responsibility of the federal government, yet the government contributes little investment to meet its promises, such as the First Nations Market Housing Fund only built 99 homes, failing to meet its target of 25 000 private homes by 2018, in part due to the homeownership model that may be unrealistic in non-market conditions (Beedy, 2015; Assembly of First Nations, 2013). As Buckley (1992) argues: “It emphasizes the reserves’ inherent limitations; the extent to which major projects have, in fact, been financed from oil revenues, now diminished; and the government’s unwillingness to commit big dollars or to give bands the power to choose programs, much less to run their own affairs” (p.35). The absence of sufficient resources to sustain both traditional and modern life on reserves weakens the autonomy of First Nations communities to manage their resources and land, contributing to the deteriorating and stagnant housing stock (Akin, 2016; Carter, 1993; Buckley, 1992). As noted in the 2017 Ipperwash Inquiry, “‘decades, if not centuries, of broken promises, dispossession, and frustration’ has resulted in ongoing First Nations disputes and protests” (McLeod et al, 2015, p.15).

The non-market conditions of many communities as a result of these policies, such as lower income levels and lack of private equity, compound the challenges associated with First Nations communities asserting their autonomy because market forces are ineffective and often regressive in these contexts (Carter, 1993). The inability of communities to leverage the resources needed to create their own housing, and the federal government’s lack of investment in this area, despite their promises in the *Indian Act*, creates conditions where many communities are waiting for more housing (Assembly of First Nations, 2013; Buckley, 1992).

4.1.2 Urban Centres

Existing literature also focuses on the urban environment and presents another stage upon which waiting occurs. Ron Bassford, the Federal minister of housing in the 1970's committed to building 50 000 homes for off-reserve Indigenous peoples, however, thirty years later less than 20 000 have been constructed under the Rural and Native Housing program and in relation to established urban housing targets (Pomeroy, 2007). Since urban Indigenous housing is considered a type of social housing, it also stopped receiving funding with federal disinvestment in this housing type that began in the 1990's (Pomeroy, 2007).

McFarlane's (2012) discussion on formality and informality within city planning and politics explains how waiting emerges in an urban centre: "formal state and political economic shifts set the conditions of possibility for informal practice, and the formal and the informal are inextricable co-constituted.... informality is the habitus of the dispossessed" (p.92-94). The challenges facing urban indigenous peoples that result from ongoing dispossession result in this population being more likely to experience homelessness than non-Indigenous populations at 1 in 15 people compared to 1 in 128 (Homeless Hub, 2017). Lack of political action to provide appropriate housing could be interpreted as launching First Nation community members into Yiftachel's (2009) grey space, where informality and uncertainty are normalized and therefore become legitimate (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015). Porter (2013) cites Yiftachel in her discussion of this power separation in cities, which can be applied to First Nations living conditions more generally:

Yiftachel and Fenster (1997) show how the "internal frontiers" within cities work to exert social control over Indigenous peoples. Yiftachel's more recent work serves to highlight the processes of "gray spacing" in urban colonial relations (Yiftachel, 2009). In both these contributions, planning and urban policy is analyzed as a key mechanism whereby social control is structured and performed. Such a focus adds an important nuance to this field: it purposefully studies the mundane and everyday ways that colonial dispossession continues to be enacted (p.298)

In a First Nations context, a similar theory could be applied when examining the colonial legacy and legislative pieces that aimed to assimilate First Nations. Conflicts therefore arise

from the unclear policies because, “[u]nlike these other migrants, though, many Aboriginal people are traveling within their traditional territories. Many have expectations that their Aboriginal rights and identities will make a difference to the ways that they structure and live their lives in urban areas” (Newhouse and Peters, 2003, p.6). Often when arriving in cities, Indigenous peoples face discrimination, difficulty accessing housing, and increased chances of homelessness, revealing the social impact of waiting in cities where Indigenous rights are not as represented or pronounced (Thurston, Turner, et al., 2013; Allan & Smylie, 2015).

4.2 Indigenous Mobility

Academic discussions surrounding Indigenous mobility connect to the implications of the waiting game as it describes the interplay between reserves and urban centres, yet does not approach these conditions through this direct and analytical lens. Clatworthy and Norris (2013) found that, “the amount of migration between communities and mobility within communities can have important consequences for the general stability and cohesion of a communities as well as for ties between communities” (p.55). If a lack of housing forces First Nations community members off-reserves, then waiting for homes and temporary permanence could weaken these communities’ ties, particularly if almost half a community is living off-reserve. Newhouse and Peters (2003) promote urban centres as “...important nodes in mobility patterns, they support the growth of an Aboriginal civil service, and they represent important gathering places” (p.9). Urban centres often provide services such as health care and employment that are unavailable on reserves, establishing them as pillars in building capacity, yet also sites where dispossession continues to be enacted (Porter, 2013).

Clatworthy and Norris (2013) also emphasize the reciprocal nature of push and pull processes between urban centres and reserves, focussing specifically on housing as a driver: “housing is a major reason for moving not just from reserves, but also to reserves, as well as for the high rates of residential mobility in urban areas. Aboriginal people tend to live in older and often deficient housing” (p.70). Many challenges associated with these mobility patterns emerge

from the literature, including losses of cultural ties, supportive services, and sense of identity (Thurston, Oelke, Turner, & Bird, 2011; Lévesque, 2001). As Lévesque, (2001) notes, “today, due to a family or community context that is particularly difficult or restrictive, many people cut their ties with the community temporarily or for long periods of time” (p.24). These lack of supports can increase the risk of homelessness, and contribute to the difficulty of securing housing. This can in turn increase the cycle of migration if housing is unavailable in urban centres as well: “the high costs of housing and other basic needs places people at risk of homelessness, this is often thought to result in a continual cycle of back and forth migration and/or homelessness experiences (Bird et al. 2010)” (Thurston, Turner, et al., 2013, p.9).

Once Indigenous peoples move off-reserves into urban centres, the policy environment they face in cities is complex as their Indian Status provides them access to certain services, but they may also become reliant of the municipal systems (Peters, 2001; Carter 1993). As such, literature also reveals a disconnect between how policies help to mitigate general challenges associated with these movements: “High rates of mobility between Aboriginal communities and other areas might not be well accommodated by various social policies and institutions” (Cooke & McWhirter, 2011, p.21). As Thurston, Turner, et al. (2013) note, “there is little or no collaboration between reserve services and the homeless service sector in Calgary” (p.6). In her discussion of governmental and First Nations relations in British Columbia, Barry (2012) proposes ways in which to strengthen ‘Government-to-Government’ relations to increase the clarity and subsequently collaborative outcomes of these coordination processes. The recognition of political inaction at the federal level and the lack of intergovernmental communication not only implies that people are waiting for housing, but that their wait may not be supported by municipal policies, or by the reserve system. Additionally, many Indigenous peoples face discrimination in cities, which further compounds the challenges of waiting (Allan & Smylie, 2015). This confusion highlights the plight of not having clear roles and responsibilities between levels of government over the governance of lands.

Housing is therefore not only a main push and pull factor, but also an ongoing challenge. Even upon arrival in urban centres, housing is difficult to access because, “waiting lists and discrimination in the housing market compound the severity of the situation for Indigenous peoples” (Thurston, Turner, et al., 2013, p. 41). If mobility is an outcome of housing inadequacies, then an exploration of how First Nations members navigate the grey space while they wait for housing either on-reserve, or in urban centres, could fill the gap surrounding the trade-offs that occur during these transition periods that result in community disconnectedness (Yiftachel, 2009).

4.3 Lived Experiences

Grey literature focuses on the lived experiences of First Nations who are waiting for housing, as reports and news articles aim to draw attention to issues present within society in clear and accessible ways. Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, is a main outlet for studies and evaluations of Indigenous housing. A 2005 Survey conducted by the organization, entitled *Temporary Supportive Housing for Aboriginal People and Their Families*, provides some preliminary insights into how Indigenous peoples in Canadian cities live during their wait for more formalized housing. It revealed that many people “[used] a motel, hostel, or shelter as an intermediary step while they were receiving medical care, escaping violence, waiting to return to their community or waiting for low-rental housing” (p.2). Waiting and non-permanent living conditions are directly connected in this statement (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015). Indigenous peoples face additional barriers to accessing housing in urban centres, particularly in regards to rental housing and home ownership options as they have different needs, education levels, and incomes as a result of limited education and employment opportunities on many reserves (Environics Institute, 2011). Another 2005 CMHC study on Edmonton and Winnipeg found that Indigenous peoples were often at risk of homelessness due to long waiting lists associated with limited subsidized housing. While rental housing was available, it was often unaffordable (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2015b). This returns to Yiftachel’s

conceptual grey space of waiting, where many individuals straddle the legal- illegal divide out of a necessity that derives from lack of meaningful political action (Yiftachel, 2009). As such, many people may be waiting for homes, and may require additional support programs in the interim to ensure their needs are met.

On-reserves, informal solutions to the housing shortage also emerge. A 2011 CBC article unearths these living circumstances in Attawapiskat First Nation, launching the conditions to the forefront: "You have about 90 people living in these portables, sharing about six bathrooms. It is not comfortable, it is not particularly safe, it is not warm, it is not big enough" (CBC news, 2011). In 2014, another article reveals the on-going struggle facing this community: "This is a community that has tried to do things right... they've worked hard on action plans; they've got housing studies; they've got water studies...but...their water is so bad that it actually corrodes their pipes; they've got not school for 500+ kids; and now, we've got families living in tents" (Stastna, 2014). The situation in Attawapiskat directly connects to the concept indefinite temporality as community members cannot seem to move past the grey space housing shortages creates (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015; Yiftachel, 2009). However, Newhouse and Peters (2003) echo Jeffrey's (2010) concept of "chronic waiting", which describes waiting as a result of lack of access to resources, as they make particular note colonial legacies and dispossession of rights over their lands has limited the capacity of First Nations to act for themselves. The use of narrative reveals different facets of the waiting period that may not otherwise be captured through quantitative methods and could serve to bridge the gap between on-reserves and urban centres as similar housing circumstances emerge in both contexts.

4.4 Theoretical Framework of Waiting as a Policy

The previous sections highlight the literature in Canada surrounding the preconditions that fuel the waiting game for First Nations peoples. In order to fill the gap in analyzing how waiting can help inform these different pieces and foster political action as a result, this paper

employs a methodological framework to clearly define waiting and its application in the exploration of Eabametoong and Nibinamik First Nations members' lived experiences.

The apartheid regime in South Africa modelled the reserve system that was established in Canada in 1876 with the introduction of the *Indian Act*, as officials from the country visited Canada to observe how the system functioned. Both programs resettled certain populations in specific locations of the land and created accompanying legislation to oppress these groups as well (DuCharme, 1986). Applying this theoretical framework to a First Nations context therefore provides compelling insights with which to analyze lived experiences of community members who are also waiting for housing, and contributes to the literature surrounding First Nations housing in Canada (Porter, 2013; Buckley, 2012; Oldfield & Greyling, 2015).

Oldfield and Greyling's (2015) research on waiting for housing in post-apartheid South Africa offers one of the first and most direct applications of waiting as a framework in which to analyze the interactions between the public and the state. Acknowledging the South African Bill of Rights that legislates access to housing, they argue that "the right to access housing translates in practice to the experience of waiting" (p.1100). Drawing on other theorists, they define waiting as a state of "permanent temporariness", positioning residents "in the middle" and faced with "uncertainty and arbitrariness ... dominated by ongoing confusion and misunderstanding" (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015, p.1100; Jeffrey, 2010, p.97; Auyero, 2012).

They also argue that in the process of waiting for housing, citizens create informal homes but remain hopeful for a state provided one. The government, however, accepts these conditions as temporary solutions to the housing crisis and therefore does not provide the homes it promises, accepting these conditions instead and using them as an unspoken rationale to prolong the waiting period (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015). As such, "the politics of waiting for housing in South Africa proves paradoxical: citizens are marked as legitimate wards of the state. Yet to live in the meanwhile and in the long term requires subversion, an agency that is sometimes visible in mobilisation and protest, and at other times out of sight, simultaneously

contentious and legitimate...” (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015, p.1100).

The ways in which the South African government fails to provide housing for its citizens despite promises to do so leaves residents with no other choice but to take housing options into their own hands, the result of which subverts bureaucratic processes and emerges in the form of informal housing: “waiting in a backyard shack, in the neighbourhood informal settlement, passing years in an already overcrowded home, ‘temporarily’ in the household, a perpetual child, registered on a housing waiting list, a ward of the state” (p.1101; Yiftachel, 2009; Lemanski, 2009). Returning to the First Nations context, literature reveals similar conditions. As Peters and Robillard (2014) note, “[t]he legacy of the colonial project was the creation of small enclaves, populated almost entirely by First Nations people, characterized by low levels of economic development and high levels of poverty” (p.656).

Oldfield and Greyling (2015) also employ lived experiences to highlight what the impact of citizens who are waiting in the grey space. For example, “Waiting is like a particularly that you are in... it’s like you’re in something that you wait for that [is] never going to happen. You wait on a thing and every day you don’t feel the same... it’s pain[ful], like you feel you are in pain of waiting for this house” (p.1103). These experiences cement the state of waiting as something profoundly affecting human spirit, and one can observe the uncertainty of the grey space in which citizens of South Africa are trying to navigate. The case studies reveal similar themes that also connect to the larger discussions surrounding waiting in a First Nations’ context and the ways in which policy and planning can help to mitigate challenges of overcrowding, mobility patterns, and political inaction.

4.5 Conclusion

The review of literature surrounding waiting and its preconditions illustrate how waiting can be used as a lens to approach the challenges associated with First Nations housing, and adds to the housing literature. Waiting is a state of unknowingness, a barrier to moving forward yet a catalyst for moving out of reserves. The conditions that result from waiting for housing,

such as overcrowding or family doubling, exacerbate and compound both physical and mental health challenges, with First Nations community members experiencing suicide rates almost double than the rest of the Canadian population (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2016; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009). Quality of life can impact the spatial distribution of people, therefore a lack of housing induces the waiting process, which in turn encourages members to leave reserves (Clatworthy, 1980). Many community members who are unable to access housing or who are required to wait for a number of years may choose to seek housing elsewhere, in environments that are not conducive nor representative of First Nations cultures. The application of a theoretical framework modelled on Oldfield and Greyling's (2015) work provides a basis upon which to evaluate the effects of waiting on First Nations populations.

5.0 Case Studies

Literature and statistics reveal that there is a housing shortage on-reserves, which suggests that many people are waiting for homes of their own. The application of waiting as a methodological framework with which to analyze First Nations and colonial relations in Canada reveals that overcrowding and out-migration from reserves is a product of the forcing community members to wait for housing. The long waiting times of up to 10 years suggests that the federal government is choosing to allow the housing crisis to continue, acquiescing to the fact that these circumstances are occurring and viewing them as acceptable in the absence of effective policies or funding allocations.

Waiting is connected to feelings of uncertainty and impermanence, making progress in one's life difficult if he or she believes that they will eventually get a home (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015). Understanding the trade-offs that occur while waiting for housing, such as assuming informal living circumstances by staying in overcrowded homes or moving to cities while waiting for a home on-reserve, present opportunities for more collaborative policies and programs. These informal solutions to the housing shortage on-reserves albeit challenging, illustrate the fierce desire of many First Nations community members to remain connected to their land and communities, despite the historical treatment of these groups aimed to assimilate them to the settler society. This lack of policy action positions waiting as a product of government inaction, and therefore an intentional decision of behalf of the government.

The exploration of Eabametoong and Nibinamik First Nations as case studies in this understanding of waiting reveal themes of informality in the grey space, chronic waiting, overcrowding, and mobility patterns, all of which comprise the waiting game and link to the Oldfield and Greyling's (2015) findings. These descriptions of waiting and its implications reveal the pervasiveness of a phenomenon that the public often takes for granted or accepts as commonplace, and highlight the senses of hopelessness and stagnancy those who are experiencing waiting face.

Eabametoong and Nibinamik First Nations are both located in the Ontario portion of the mid-Canada corridor, the resource rich lands of the boreal forest and beyond land located between “southern settlements and treeline” (Van Nostrand, 2014; Rohmer, 1969). Both communities face severe housing shortages that result in overcrowded living conditions on reserves and force over 50% of community members to live off-reserve in Thunder Bay, often waiting in the city until they can return to their home community (*Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together*, 2014, p.3; Clatworthy, 2010).

The following analysis focuses on the lived experiences of Eabametoong and Nibinamik First Nations community members as identified through the *Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together* project affiliated with Ryerson University. These stories provide critical insight into the impacts of the waiting game two First Nations communities that can apply to the larger discussions surrounding waiting in this context more generally. As Oldfield and Greyling (2015b) state: “In the meantime, waiting for housing is an often overlooked reality, as well as an institutional and bureaucratic challenge that underpins housing politics”.

5.1 Eabametoong First Nation

Eabametoong First Nation, also known as Fort Hope, is located on the north of Eabametoong Lake, 360 km north of Thunder Bay. Eabametoong First Nation has 2199 members with 1,014 living on-reserve, and 949 members living off-reserve, illustrating how almost half are living out of the community, many of whom may want to return (Statistics Canada, 2017; Matawa First Nations Management, 2014). Overall, there are 239 houses in the community, and new houses have not been constructed for a number of years, resulting in an average housing occupancy rate of 4.35 people, compared to the Ontario average of 2.9 (Government of Canada, 2017; Poverty Action, 2017). The use of existing houses for communal services such as day cares and other programming contributes to the housing crisis. With under five built a year, and more than 80+ requests for housing, action must be taken as clearly people are waiting for homes. Not only is more appropriate housing required overall, these homes must also ensure the needs

of certain groups like elders and young families are met (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2015).

Like many First Nations in this area, Eabametoong First Nation is a fly-in only community with winter road accessibility for 2-3 weeks. The physical isolation and separation of community members can have negative social and emotional impacts (Peters & Robillard, 2014).

Additionally, these houses do not reflect the priorities of community members, which also contributes to the social challenges associated with the housing itself such as overcrowding and physical and mental health (McCartney, 2016; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009). An exploration of the circumstances in which people wait for homes, draws attention to these realities that solidifies the need for more housing.

5.1.1 Lived Experiences of Waiting

The lived experiences of Eabametoong First Nation members while they wait for housing reveal how they manage this period of uncertainty, illustrating the ways in which informality occurs in a First Nations context. In South Africa, waiting for housing after the repercussions of the apartheid becomes a state of “permanent temporariness” for residents who were positioned “in the middle” and who faced ongoing confusion and misunderstanding (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015, p.1100; Auyero, 2012). One can perceive the informal living conditions that foster these feelings, however, as solutions to housing when political commitments to provide homes falls short.

In Eabametoong, the narratives of community experiences reveal similar feelings of uncertainty and distress that are associated with waiting for housing, as many people live in overcrowded homes. In the community, household compositions are intergenerational and can be made up of multiple families. With limited housing, overcrowding is the reality for many First Nations if they want to remain on their reserves to wait for a home of their own:

“There’s a lot of single people, bachelors and bachelorettes, they’re living with their parents and still it’s crowded. Maybe one person doesn’t have any kids but she has her own room. Maybe her sister or her brother has a family and they’re living in another room, plus the parents you

know and the nieces and nephews...It's a crisis, the housing" (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2015, p.13).

"Some houses are jam packed, every room to the floor. And I know some houses like that, I use to live in one of them, well I still kinda do. There's like 3 rooms in my house and... I have like 3 brothers and 2 sisters and I share my room with my youngest sister and the other with my mom. Houses are jam packed" (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2015, p. 14).

"It's always been like that, families always crammed together with maybe two or three families in one house, two for sure. Average of two families in the house" (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2015, p.13).

When reading these quotes together, one can feel the claustrophobia of homes in Eabametoong and the number of people in a household competing for space to breathe, to mature, and to assert their autonomy over their lives and life course. This is particularly evident in the inability of community members to have a home in which to raise their families and having to remain with their parents because there is nowhere else to go: "I know my family is waiting for a house of our own, for our own family. And so what I really want is a house for me and my family to live" (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together 2015, p. 12, p.18). Family doubling in Eabametoong is clearly occurring, which adds increased stress to the physical structure of houses, which contributes to the deterioration of homes and will ultimately contribute to the housing shortage that forces more community members to wait.

As such, the stories reveal how community members are currently navigating their waiting period for more housing, infiltrating the existing housing stock in order to remain in their communities. They also hint towards future challenges as population growth will outpace the creation of new housing, suggesting that waiting will only become more pronounced in future years. Community members recognize the need for action to be taken:

"They always say there's going to be housing but it never gets provided" (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2015, p.12).

"We don't have money, we're always broke that's why we have no housing, poor housing" (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2015, p.19).

"Sometimes there's not enough funding for whatever they say they're going to get like programs, housing, and stuff. Like the housing is really poor too" (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2015, p.19).

“I think the biggest problem would probably be the money...They haven't like been building. Like, for example, they haven't been building houses...They usually build like 6 to 9 houses every summer but the past 3 years they haven't. So, yeah, I think that money is the biggest, biggest problem” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2015, p.19).

Lack of funding is identified as the major barrier to building housing and therefore the largest contributor to the shortage of homes. In these experiences, one sees the impact of broken federal targets that fuel the waiting game, as community members share that these promises for housing have not been fulfilled, compounded by the fact that funding in general appears absent, and that the pace at which housing is built has slowed as a result. Inflected in these sentiments are the impacts of the political role in perpetrating waiting and uncertainty. Phrases such as ‘they always say there’s going to be housing’, ‘they haven’t been building’, and ‘we’re always broke’ reveal the normative standard of waiting for something to be done, as well as the limited capacity of community members to act on their own volition due to these conditions that result from a colonial agenda.

5.1.2. Mobility Patterns

When housing circumstances on-reserves become unbearable or inaccessible in Ontario’s portion of the Mid-Canada Corridor, community members often move to Thunder Bay in hopes of finding better housing options, or to secure employment and education opportunities (Norris & Clatworthy, 2003). Eabametoong First Nations was the fourth most represented Nation in Thunder Bay at 195 people in the 1996 survey (Clatworthy, 2000), compared to Fort William First Nation that had 290 members. Notably, Fort William is only 20km away from the city, whereas Eabametoong is over 300km. In Thunder Bay, it appears that the closer to the urban centre a reserve is, the more likely it will encourage in-migration rates to the city (Clatworthy, 2000). In Eabametoong, the community members describe how they move to Thunder Bay as a result for waiting for housing: “I just moved away from Fort Hope for a while ‘cause I had no home here” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2015, p.13). They also return, however, which adds increased stress to existing housing stock: “I guess you need a bigger

house ‘cause my daughter will be back after she finishes school” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2015, p.13).

Within these narratives, one sees how community members are straddling a unique type of grey space where they are neither living fully on the reserve, or in urban centres, as many hope to return to their communities. They are waiting for a home. Recognizing the trade-offs associated with these waiting experiences, planning and policy decisions could consider strengthening community ties within urban centres through providing more housing options, or creating places where First Nations can meaningfully interact with the natural environment, if they so choose.

5.1.3 Conclusion

At the current rate of housing construction, and the increasing demand for housing as family size continues to grow, Eabametoong will need more than 80 houses to meet its future needs, costing over 24 million dollars (Cooke, Holland, et al., 2015). However, recognizing the lived experiences when community members are waiting for these homes highlights their solutions to the crisis in terms of creating more housing on-reserves. By recognizing these experiences, future programming on-reserves could consider tactics to mitigate the challenges associated with overcrowded living conditions and out-migration from reserves.

5.2 Nibinamik First Nation

Nibinamik First Nation, also known as Summer Beaver, is located on Nibinamik Lake, approximately 500 km north of Thunder Bay. With a population of approximately 300 members living in its 102 houses, almost half of the homes have 6 or more people living in them. This community is much smaller than Eabametoong, but faces similar housing shortages (Government of Canada, 2011). AANDC provides the band with approximately \$230 000 for housing that is divided in half for capital funding and planning purposes, yet the cost of building

a house in Nibinamik is approximately \$245 700 per home¹ (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2017; Maamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p. 2). In total, it is estimated that it will cost over \$14 million dollars to meet the current demand for 50 to 60 homes, which doesn't even include the future growth of the community. When applying this calculation, one can clearly see that this money is insufficient to meet the housing need in the community that results in an average waiting period of 10 years, but can range up to 17 years. This long waiting period results in overcrowding and encourages community members to leave the reserve, which also impacts family connectedness and increases social stress.

Nibinamik First Nation is also a fly-in community only with a winter road accessible during 2-3 months. Notably, the built form of the community differs from other First Nations reserves as members relocated to the area from another reserve, and were therefore able to build their houses where they wanted, out of materials such as wood logs that preserve traditional practices and priorities. A large forest fire destroyed the trees from the surrounding area which were used in construction, however, making the community dependent on materials from outside the community that are not only costlier, but also less appropriate for their needs. These conditions increase the costs associated with building new homes, and with repairing or renovating existing ones (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p.2). This is problematic because it creates a situation wherein community members cannot build the houses they need or want, resulting in overcrowded living conditions or in members leaving the community as well.

5.2.1 Lived Experiences of Waiting

In the lived experiences of Nibinamik community members who are waiting for housing reveal similar themes of overcrowding, mobility, and lack of political action, as those living in Eabametoong described. Through the analysis of these quotes in relation to waiting and the

¹ Informed from conversations with leaders in Nibinamik First Nation

state of being positioned in the middle, one again sees the informal trade-offs that occur in housing options if First Nations want to stay in their communities:

“There are about 50 families in the community who needs to... have their own house, especially the people have common law. A lot of people living, their families together, I don't know how many each family is... in the one household” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p. 9).

“[My house is] crowded. Yeah, it's really packed in there. 'Cause we have one room that's split, we use curtains to... make walls, so the older guys can have their privacy” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p. 31).

“We are overcrowded but there are no other choices, no other houses in the community, and no new housing this summer. That's why everyone is living with us. Every year we apply for housing and there is nothing” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p. 9).

“I think we need more houses, 'cause we're overcrowding in our houses. Like I live with my five kids and ... there's about eight of us living there right now, in one house” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, 30).

These statements reveal that waiting for housing translates into the experience of overcrowding, and demonstrate feelings of isolation, lack of housing choices, and intergenerational household compositions. Community members recognize that their homes are overcrowded, yet are unsure as to the extent of the phenomenon within the community, suggesting once again that these are normative conditions that are pervasive throughout the reserve. The repetition of ‘no other choices, no other houses...and no new housing’ suggest the stagnancy of waiting and highlights the lack of progress in the physical development of the community, the result of which creates conditions where there is a lack of privacy, family doubling, and limited space.

The impact of these living conditions associated with waiting also emerge in the narratives of community members:

“I don't have a house to claim my own... That's what's happening with me. It, it feels like I can't buy my own things... I can't buy a couch 'cause I wouldn't know where to put it, even if I buy my own things... My stove... my oven... I don't know where I'm going to put them” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p.32).

“It's like I'm being trapped in a room, like in my room. I'm being trapped in there. Just don't have much room to roam around in, with other family members inside the house, and there's not much privacy” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p.31).

“Well, the way you live expresses... the way you feel... if you’re in, like, in a nice house... you’ll feel good, right? But if you’re in a house that’s like, always stressful, you’re gonna be stressed out all the time. And it gets to you, it just keeps piling up. Especially when you keep asking and there’s nothing that can be done” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p. 37)

The narratives also reveal the lack of progress that is associated with waiting for housing. Community members are unable to assert their autonomy over the spaces in which they live, as there may not be room, or it may not be their own home. They are again living in the grey space of having a place to call their own that meets their needs, and having a place to live at all (Yiftachel, 2009). As one member notes, this waiting period can be stressful as environmental conditions of housing can impact the well-being of community members. Additionally, he or she highlights how their requests are futile as ‘there is nothing that can be done’. In this case, the trade-off of remaining in the community means compromising the human spirit. The lack of progress and associated feelings of hopelessness therefore becomes a product of a funding deficit that frames and fosters the conditions of waiting:

“I know they have a budget too on housing and... there’s a waiting, a waiting list for people that needs their housings to be fixed. I mean I can do it myself, but you know, I don’t have...the income to afford to buy what I need at the house so that’s a problem there” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p. 26).

“ Move to the next step... Quit living in the past... We gotta think about... the kids up ahead of us. How are they gonna live? Where are they gonna live?” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p. 47).

“If I was paying rent, it probably would be my tent, [I] would be sitting outside right now. I’d be living in a shack somewhere” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p.8).

As these quotes highlight, the colonial dispossession and lack of economic base in Nibinamik means that even if community members are skilled enough to repair their homes, they are unable to do so. Within these statements, however, is a desire and an optimism that the community can move forward, it just requires the resources to do so. Notably, the second quote draws attention to the need to plan for the future, not only meet the current needs. This presents another opportunity for planning and policy decisions to address these challenges, the result of which may make the waiting period for homes more comfortable, and ensure that future

homes that are built are through partnerships that incorporate the distinctive needs of community members that they identify.

5.2.2 Mobility Patterns

As seen in Eabametoong First Nation, Nibinamik community members also migrate to Thunder Bay, yet they are located an additional 300km away. While there are no exact details identifying how many community members live in Thunder Bay, the narrative experiences reveal that moving to the city is a definitive trade-off when waiting for a home: “I hope soon before the winter comes there will be like an empty house if families move, or move, around, or move out of the community. But I am used to living in a crowded house” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p.7). This community member describes the need for a home before the winter, which suggests that the existing housing is inadequate during these months. He or she also describes the different mobility patterns that emerge including moving between houses or moving out of the community. The phrase ‘I am used to living in a crowded house’ further solidifies the normalcy of overcrowding and connects this condition to the relocation away from the reserve. In the case of one community member, the housing swap transgressed reserve and urban boundaries, highlighting the fluidity of these movements: “Then I moved in with my sister after that, my other sister, and then she moved to Thunder Bay and I kept her house. She gave me her house. And that’s when my other sister moved back, moved back from Thunder Bay to here, and she moved in with me” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p.8). This statement highlights the sense of impermanence associated with how families are mitigating their waiting period for housing, but the attachment to his or her community is evident. Unfortunately, the lack of housing often prevents community members who leave Nibinamik for education or employment purposes from returning.

When arriving in Thunder Bay, housing options for community members are not much better than those found on-reserves, again alluding to the ineffectiveness of housing policies:

“I have a strong urge to move back out. But I don’t want to move back out ‘cause it’s going to be the same thing over there, the houses they give the Natives over there, is the same conditions as the houses here. Like Thunder Bay. The house that... I was living in was in Limbrick, and everything was falling apart, or already falling apart” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014, p.28).

Thunder Bay has one of the highest proportions of Indigenous homelessness of Canadian municipalities, comprising 75% of city’s homeless population (Porter, 2016). As this story reveals, the housing options available in the city are not much better, and are further difficult to access because of waiting lists associated with social housing more broadly. These patterns again highlight the grey spacing associated with waiting, as not knowing whether there will be housing in which to live makes it difficult to establish new connections or maintain existing ones. Even when community members move to Thunder Bay in search of more housing options, they face similar, if not worse, conditions, which suggests that Indigenous housing both on and off reservations needs to be re-examined and reprioritized from a policy standpoint.

5.2.3 Conclusion

Nibinamik is a much smaller community than Eabametoong, yet faces a similar housing shortage that results in overcrowded living conditions that negatively impact the health of residents living in these homes. This shortage encourages community members to leave the reserve, and the lack of housing makes it difficult to return. Even when arriving in Thunder Bay, the housing options are not much better, perpetrating living in the grey space and legitimizing the phenomenon of waiting by limiting the options for First Nations.

5.3 Services Available in Thunder Bay

Thunder Bay is the closest major urban centre to Eabametoong and Nibinamik, as well as other First Nations communities located within Northern Ontario. The review of literature and use of case studies makes it clear that waiting for housing in these remote locations encourages movement to Thunder Bay, in addition to the major draws of employment and educational opportunities, as most students that want to attend high school must move to the city

temporarily. A study of urban Indigenous peoples living in Thunder Bay established that many of urban First Nations feel that they can contribute positively to the city, but feel that they are discriminated against by the non-Indigenous populations (Environics, 2011). Indigenous populations are also the fastest growing population in Canada, increasing from 49% living in cities in 2006 to 56% in 2011 (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2016). The 2006 census also reveals that “a total of 10,055 people in the Thunder Bay census metropolitan area (CMA) identified themselves as Aboriginal, that is, First Nations, Métis or Inuit. Indigenous peoples account for eight percent (8.3%) of the total population of Thunder Bay” (Environics, 2011). Almost half of this group identified as First Nations (Environics, 2011). These socio-demographic characteristics create demand for programs in the city that meet the needs of the urban Indigenous population who are waiting for housing, in addition to ensuring the capacity for programs to meet this demographic in the future as the population continues to grow.

The following section highlights notable services for First Nations members living off-reserve to better understand the resources available to them in the city, and to identify gaps in services provision that could be addressed to help mitigate the waiting period for those waiting to return to their home communities, or for those hoping to establish a new one in Thunder Bay, while maintaining these original connections.

5.3.1 Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre

Friendship centres play an important role in meeting the socio-cultural needs of First Nations peoples living off-reserve, as well as the larger urban Indigenous community: “The Friendship Centre Movement (FCM) is the country’s most significant off-reserve Indigenous service delivery infrastructure” (National Association of Friendship Centres, n.d.). As one of the original six centres, the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre functions as a place where indigenous peoples can come together to be supported at all life stages through the centre’s programming and capacity building initiatives. The centre also serves important

consultative roles with all levels of government in addition to a variety of agencies and interest groups (National Association of Friendship Centres, n.d.).

Notable programs that relate to housing is the Homelessness Partnering Strategy that adopts a community- based approach to addressing the unique homeless situations of communities. The Community Plan 2014-2019 for *Thunder Bay Aboriginal* stipulates that “As this Aboriginal Homelessness allocation is over \$200,000, the community is required to commit at least 40% of its HPS allocation towards a Housing First approach starting April 1, 2016” (Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre, 2015). The housing first model is being increasingly explored as a tool to reduce homelessness by providing a concrete base upon which to develop skills and hold jobs (Polvere, MacLeod et al., 2014). Furthermore, the centre offers useful programs such as education and skills training, health and wellness, and youth programs to help meet the needs of the population it serves to increase their success in an urban setting. The Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre therefore plays a key role in centralizing services for Indigenous peoples living in the city, including off-reserve First Nations members. The suite of programs it offers presents different ways to mitigate the loss of ties and isolation found within the waiting game.

5.3.2 Native People of Thunder Bay Development Corporation Housing Program

As a registered non-profit organization since its inception in 1973, the Native People of Thunder Bay Development Corporation Housing Program serves to offer affordable and suitable housing opportunities for Indigenous peoples and seniors within Thunder Bay and larger area. It also provides the associated social supports needed for successful housing initiatives because the corporation recognizes that, “Aboriginal families, for health reasons, education and employment opportunities arrived in the City needing safe and affordable housing” (Native People of Thunder Bay Corporation, 2003a). Their portfolio consists of 239 units across Thunder Bay, the majority of which are three bedrooms suitable for families. They also have one-bedroom units for Elders that are located in close proximity to one another to foster a sense

of community (Native People of Thunder Bay Corporation, 2003b). The Native Urban Housing Program is a specific program within the corporation's portfolio that is a result of the federal government's Section 95 of the National Housing Act of 1986 that provides affordable homes to low-income people within Thunder Bay. Additionally, "[t]he Urban Native Housing Program also fosters a greater cultural understanding between Native and Non-Native neighbours (Native People of Thunder Bay Corporation, 2003c). However, it still requires the completion of an application to access units which may be difficult for recent migrants to the city, and is treated as a social policy rather than its own program that reflects the unique needs of the First Nations populations it serves. The program, however, serves as an example of a policy that could be strengthened to reduce discrimination facing many Indigenous peoples in urban centres.

5.3.3 Nishnawbe Aski Nation Head Office

The Nishnawbe Aski Nation "represents the legitimate, socioeconomic, and political aspirations of its First Nation members of Northern Ontario to all levels of government in order to allow local self-determination while establishing spiritual, cultural, social, and economic independence" (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, n.d). As Matawa member nations of Nishnawbe Aski, NAN is able to advocate on behalf of Eabametoong and Nibinamik to the various government levels and to other organizations, as well as provide support to the communities when necessary. Additionally, NAN provides almost daily news updates that keep people informed about the different stories impacting communities and also use this forum to disseminate pertinent information (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, n.d). Notably, they are conducting a Seven Youth Inquest into the seven teenage suicides of First Nations living in Thunder Bay that have occurred within the past few years, one of which was a Nibinamik boy. This work is important to ensuring the needs of the Treaty 9 First Nations are being met. With the main office located in Thunder Bay, there could be opportunities to support the off-reserve residents living within the city.

6.0 Discussion and Conclusions

The limited number of homes in both Eabametoong and Nibinamik First Nations induces the experience of waiting, a state of living that is wrought with uncertainty and stagnancy (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015). This is problematic from a community development and planning perspective because housing shortages limit the ability of communities to progress in terms of their physical built form, as well as in regards to community members' capacity. If First Nations peoples leave reserves to gain educations and skills, then a lack of housing may prevent them from returning and applying their work to their home community (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014; 2015). Oldfield and Greyling (2015) reveal how housing serves more than as a material asset, but is in fact crucial to feelings of belonging and participation by legitimizing one's role in the city. Within the First Nations context and the interplay between reserves and urban centres, one can also observe how access to appropriate homes is directly linked to feelings of hope, optimism, and progress. The analysis of Eabametoong and Nibinamik First Nations' lived experiences directly reflect the themes established in the literature review and methodological framework. In these communities, waiting presents itself as overcrowding, mobility, and lack of political action.

6.1 Waiting as Overcrowding

The *Indian Act* stipulated that the federal government would be responsible for the provision of resources on reserves including housing, yet its policies disposes First Nations from managing the reserves for themselves in ways that meet their physical, social, and spiritual needs (McLeod et al, 2015; Buckley, 1992). The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation defines housing suitability as having the appropriate number of bedrooms for the household composition and establishes how residents can be dispersed within these rooms in compliance with the National Occupancy Standard (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2014). For example, there should be a bedroom for "each contributing adult couple; each lone parent;

unattached household member 18 years of age and over; same-sex pair of children under age 18; and [for] additional boy or girl in the family, unless there are two opposite sex children under 5 years of age, in which case they are expected to share a bedroom” (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2014). The current situation subverts these definitions, highlighting the negotiation of the grey space that appears as a form of invisible protest (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015).

The excerpts of Eabametoong and Nibinamik First Nations members about their experiences in the grey space of waiting often returned to the overcrowding of homes and living arrangements that do not meet the National Occupancy Standard. Existing research establishes a clear connection between overcrowding and negative health outcomes as these conditions add emotional and physical stress on residents, with the suicide rate for First Nations youth being five to six times the national average (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009). First Nations peoples, however, often have no other choice if they want to remain in their communities, a direct result of insufficient and inappropriate housing stock and a clear indication that more needs to be done. In the larger context of First Nations residing within the Mid-Canada Corridor, similar narratives can be found that acutely highlight the social impact of overcrowding:

“I’m sick of being in houses where there’s too many people. People get stressed out and fight. One time there was three families in that house, my old house, you know back home [on the reserve]. There’s no homes up there. They’re just packed like sardines in there. And then it causes stress and makes them drink and fight and oh my” and, “On the reserve, there’s not that many houses. We need more houses and it’s forced other people on my reserve to live outside of the reserve ‘cause there’s families living in families. Like their kins and then their kins” (Peters & Robillard, 2009, p.664).

Overcrowding is a trade-off that symbolizes the desire for people to stay connected to their lands. The narratives of these community members at different life stages, living in different First Nations reserves, illustrate the normalcy of living in a house with too many people and highlight the challenges it presents.

These conditions can also be found in South Africa, as individuals and families wait in informal settlements, backyards, and hostels, in overcrowded public and private housing” (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015, p.1101; Lemanski, 2009). In Oldfield and Greyling’s (2015) work, participants claimed that “[l]iving in these uncertain situations is not ‘living’, interviewees explained, but merely existing, getting by on a day-to-day basis, unable to plan for the future or to live fulfilled lives” (p.1109). Respondents from Eabametoong and Nibinamik highlighted similar feelings of being trapped and acknowledge how poor housing increases levels stress in terms of moving forward, and in living their day to day lives. Expressions such as ‘I use to live in them, well I still kinda do’ and ‘it’s always been like that’ reinforce the temporal element of the housing crisis as it is not improving and is therefore forcing community members to wait (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together, 2014;2015).

Eabametoong and Nibinamik First Nations members are living in perpetual wait and grey spaces, where they are uncertain when they will get a home of their own, and therefore uncertain if they should remain on-reserve in overcrowded homes, or leave in the hopes of finding housing elsewhere, sometimes having no other option but the latter (Yiftachel, 2009). Chronic waiting refers to “limited access to social, political and economic resources”, the product of which further compounds the housing crisis and is an evident barrier for community members to repair and maintain their homes (Jeffrey, 2010; Rogers, 2012). With wait periods of up to ten years, understanding the lived experiences of waiting as it appears in overcrowded living conditions is crucial to interpreting how informality is practiced on-reserves.

The federal government’s decision to not provide enough homes to meet the communities’ current and future needs, despite its promises to prevent overcrowding stipulated in the *Indian Act*, suggest that waiting is commonplace and a federally accepted solution to the housing crisis. Understanding the trade-offs that occur and the challenges associated with overcrowding presents possible areas that community driven policies on-reserves could target,

such as increased funding for community spaces through other programs that would allow people different places to go when their home environment becomes suffocating.

6.2 Waiting as mobility

When First Nations peoples move into urban centres, like other urbanites they become reliant on the services available within that city: “High rates of mobility between Aboriginal communities and other areas might not be well accommodated by various social policies and institutions” (Cooke & McWhirter, 2011, p.21). Once Indigenous peoples move off-reserves into urban centres, they move into a blurred and complex policy environment within unclear regulations as to what constitutes federal, provincial, and municipal responsibilities (Peters, 2001). The lack of coordinated efforts between reserve services and the homeless service sector in cities reveals a gap in which a grey space could be created as community members can utilize the services available through their “Indian” status, yet may be unable to not be able to access appropriate resources within the urban centre such as housing or maintaining connections to their communities (Thurston, Turner, et al, 2013, p.6; Brandon & Peters, 2014).

In their discussion of South Africa, Oldfield and Greyling (2015) note the uncertainty and frustration associated with the wait for housing. A similar phenomenon emerges in the First Nations context that relates to the grey space lack of service coordination fosters: “Transition from reserve to city life leaves many Aboriginal persons “in-between”; living without a regular home, security or community. The life skills one needs to live in an urban setting are not fostered in the on reserve setting” (McCallum & Isaac, 2011, p. 27; Oldfield & Greyling, 2015).

Clatworthy and Norris (2013) position housing as a main catalyst for moving to urban centres, as well as back to reserves, but note how often these peoples reside in “older and deficient housing” (p.70). In the case of Eabametoong and Nibinamik, waiting presents itself as a lack of permanence, both in specific houses on reserves, as many families move between homes, and in the larger urban-reserve migrations (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together 2015; 2014). In essence, the movement patterns between houses on-reserves, as well

as between reserves and urban centres, illustrate the informality associated with the grey space of waiting, and positions this as a tactic to mitigate housing situations as well as an opportunity to create new ones. As Oldfield and Greyling (2015) note, “[t]he speed and scale, as well as geographies, of the development of public, state-funded, housing in South African cities have been consistently contested and debated” (p.1105). It appears that Thunder Bay, even at its distance away, is still a temporary home for many community members, or a place in which they go to obtain an education.

The lived experiences of community members effectively highlight the fluidity between reserves and urban centres, revealing that those living in Thunder Bay want to return to their communities, but often space in homes is dependent on other people moving between houses or to Thunder Bay themselves. Clatworthy (2000) studied the number of First Nations peoples living in the city, determining that the distance to these places affects the reciprocity of mobility patterns. This may be due to the fly-in and winter access of northern communities, as it is not as easy to leave. He also notes that the role of distances is reflective of specific urban centres as opposed to representing a generalized trend across municipalities (Clatworthy, 2000, p.28). From a planning lens, this exploration is critical to understanding the potential needs of First Nations community members who are living off-reserve if they eventually want to return to their reserves. The narrative experiences capture the desire to remain in communities that quantitative data and statistics alone may exclude.

Community members are taking their housing choices into their own hands, using their own volition to find a place to live in order to remain their communities when more housing is not provided. If housing quality and quantity cause community members to leave the reserve, and if many are unable to return for this same reason, then planning initiatives should help to support the associated challenges and provide more appropriate housing in both contexts. When navigating the in-between space, First Nations peoples transgress the political boundaries established between the reserve system and urban centres (Porter, 2013). This dynamism

illustrates how mobility and the movement within the grey space is another example of the informality that subverts bureaucratic systems, despite the original intent of these systems to manage where and how Canada's First Nations live.

6.3 Waiting as a Political Tool

Existing literature identifies lack of proper funding and autonomy as a major contributor to the housing crisis facing reserves (Anaya, 2014; Larcombe, et al. 2010; Vowel, 2016; Snyder, Wilson, and Whitford, 2015). First Nations reserves fall under the federal government's political jurisdiction. However, despite the government's promises to help address the crisis, the products rarely meet the housing targets they claim, or most importantly, the needs of First Nations communities living on-reserves (Beedy, 2015; Akin, 2016; Peters, 2001). For example, "the First Nations Market Housing Fund helped build just 99 homes to date and is nowhere near meeting its ambitious target of 25,000 privately owned dwellings by 2018" (Beedy, 2015). A 1965 Memorandum for Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada, entitled *Canadian Standards of Housing In Indian Reserves Communities* was created in pursuit of developing a public housing program that expands beyond the Indigenous population, but also includes them. The belief was that this approach would allow for a more seamless connection between reserves and urban centres, while also maintaining Indigenous identities. The associated housing survey estimated that: "If it is assumed that these 29,727 families occupied the 25,786 houses in the Survey, there existed an apparent doubling affecting 7,882 families representing 26% of the total" (O'Connell, 1965, p.6). Doubling highlights the lack of housing and indicates that households are sharing dwellings while waiting for a home of their own. In questioning the pace at which houses are constructed, O'Connell proposes a number of insights that increase the probability that many First Nations community members are waiting for housing: "1) [the pace of housing] fall[s] behind new family formations by some 300 homes per year, or by 21% of new family formations; 2) fail[s] to overcome housing backlogs resulting in doubling; 3) fail[s] to replace existing large volumes of substandard housing; and 4) to be of a standard perpetuating

substandard housing on reservations” (p.10). These insights return to the regulations stipulated in the *Indian Act* and reveal that they have not been met (Indian Act, 1876). If applying these factors to the waiting game, lack of political action appears as a policy choice that allows for inappropriate housing and ultimately waiting.

Lack of policy action is considered as leaving social policy issues to market forces (Bemelmans-Videc, Rist, & Vedung, 2003). In communities, such as First Nations reserves, where constitutional agreements inhibit the ability of the population to leverage their own resources, not much can be built without investment from higher levels of government (Allan & Smylie, 2015; Beedy, 2015; Akin, 2016). This can result in a dichotomy between formality and informality: “If formality operates through the fixing of value, including the mapping of spatial value, then *informality operates through the constant negotiability of value*” (Roy & Al Sayyad, 2004, p.5). Echoing Yiftachel (2009), Roy and AlSayyad (2004) believe that this navigation “constitute the rules of the game, determining the nature of transactions between individuals and institutions and within institutions” (p.5). Through this lens, the lack of political action to adequately address the housing crisis on reserves translates into the experience of waiting that keeps community members within the grey space. While the federal government has committed to developing a National Housing Strategy, its promises to First Nations communities generally and historically fail to meet targets, the effects of which reverberate across First Nations communities (Carter, 1993; Buckley 1992).

By doing little to combat and mitigate the housing crisis in a meaningful way, the federal government is therefore allowing the crisis to continue (Lane and Hibbard, 2005; Porter, 2013; Beedy, 2015; Akin, 2016; Woods, 2016). The process of waiting becomes a course of deferring targeted change, as Oldfield and Greyling (2015) note in the South African context: “waiting for the state is both normalized and legitimate” (p.1101). Parallels emerge in the First Nations’ context in Canada because the consistent lack of meeting housing targets symbolizes the inability to keep pace with demand, therefore increasing waiting periods (O’Connell, 1965).

Moving forward, adopting an Indigenous Planning lens could be more fruitful in creating targets that are both achievable and meaningful, and supportive of informal housing options that subvert traditional planning practice that appears to be ineffective on reserves.

Oldfield and Greyling's (2015) observation that waiting for housing in South Africa is a common and intergenerational condition that encourages people to continue to expect a formal house mirrors the phenomenon in Canada. The impacts of colonialism continue to dispossess First Nations peoples from the ability to create their own housing that meets their unique and identified needs (Akin, 2016; Carter, 1993; Buckley, 1992). As seen with *the Indian Act* and the colonial legacies that limit the autonomy of First Nations peoples living on-reserves, dispossession continues to be enacted through the deferred provision of housing, which results in a housing shortage that force community members to wait. Additionally, these elements can weaken the administrative capacity of band managers or housing authorities to address the crisis without appropriate supports.

Waiting therefore becomes a complex political tool. By making First Nations wait for appropriate housing and for more to be done, the federal government perpetrates the juxtaposition between action and stagnancy, contributing to the grey space that First Nations community members must navigate: "The shortfall of housing and poor housing conditions force many Aboriginal people to choose between bad housing in their home communities and insecure and unaffordable housing in cities like Winnipeg" (Brandon & Peters, 2014, p.2). In the South African context, "[s]ignificantly, it is in the temporalities, spaces, and strategies of waiting that state–citizen politics are moulded and contested" (Oldfield & Greyling 2015, p.1110). If the non-provision of housing is a tactic to encourage movement off reserves into urban centres, then the overcrowded living conditions and migration back to reserves subverts these processes and form the contested space, revealing the strength of the community, and the importance of maintaining community ties. The intergenerational conditions to which Oldfield and Greyling

(2015) allude also come to fruition in these communities, as not only are there different generations living in the same house, the housing crisis pervades generations as well.

Moving forward, collaborative planning practices could help strengthen the ability of these communities to utilize their skills and create the housing they want. In Nibinamik this housing is already reflected in the original log homes, and in Eabametoong, it can be reflected through facilitation and partnerships that prioritize the Indigenous worldview and the community's unique values.

7.0 Planning with First Nations

Planning with First Nations communities is beginning to draw more academic and media attention as more practitioners recognize the systematic oppression faced by this group, and are more cognisant of the ways in which to make the planning process more partnership based and meaningful as a result. This shift in practice is a step towards reconciliation and privileging the unique position of Indigenous peoples within Canada. An exploration of waiting for housing highlights new areas for further advancement of this framework.

Planning can be an effective tool to help facilitate reconciliation processes by helping to create environments that prioritize the Indigenous worldview. The recognition that engagement and consultation practices with First Nations communities required a change prompted grassroots activism post the introduction of *1975 Self-Determination and Educational Assistances Act* in the United States (Jojola, 2008). A group of practitioners created “a theory of action that they named Indigenous Planning. Among its pronouncements were ideals that called for a radical re-examination of contemporary planning practice through long-term learning, the empowerment of community voice, and the advocacy of culture and tradition” (Jojola, 2008, p.42). This exploration of waiting directly fits within these themes. Current houses on-reserves are representative of the disregard for cultural needs, a lack of which compounds the housing crisis and promotes waiting. In recent years, there has been increased attention to reclaim and reprioritize this framework, as well as shift towards a more partner based model (Jojola, 2008; Matunga, 2013; McCartney, 2016). This repossession is achievable through promoting collaborative and meaningful partnerships with First Nations:

What distinguishes Indigenous planning from mainstream practice is its reformulation of planning approaches in a manner that incorporates ‘traditional’ knowledge and cultural identity. Key to the process is the acknowledgement of an indigenous world-view, which not only serves to unite it philosophically, but also to distinguish it from neighbouring, non-land based communities (Jojola, 2008, p.42).

This worldview directly relates to housing, the way it is currently constructed and the ways in

which it can be improved. In pursuit of this emerging discipline, many researchers focus on strategies to engage more meaningfully with First Nation communities, and in the process, build the community's capacity to address the issues they may face themselves, and thus regain autonomy over their resources that was lost through colonial measures (Jojola, 2008, 2013; Porter, 2013; McCartney, 2016). Lane and Hibbard (2005) cite Friedmann's theory of Transformative Planning that highlights planning's possible "emancipatory role...its potential to transform the structural dimensions of oppression" (p.172). In relation to housing, McCartney (2016) echoes, "Planning's critical role of implementation in the housing system, together with the discipline's modern theoretical potential as emancipator (Ugarte, 2014) and provider of hope (Forester, 1982), provides an opportunity for planners to be leaders in building a new relationship and championing change with Indigenous communities" (p.21). Waiting for housing presents itself in the First Nations context as a form of oppression, as a product of failed policies and broken promises. As such, examining this grey space and addressing the challenges community members experience during this period presents another analytical terrain upon which to strengthen Indigenous planning efforts and alleviate these oppressive conditions that are symbolic of colonial power (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015; McCartney, 2016).

8.0 Planning and Policy Recommendations

Throughout the literature and exemplified in the lived experiences of First Nations community members, a number of challenges emerge that planning and policy could mitigate moving forward to ensure that the trade-offs experienced while waiting are no longer accepted as common place in the political negotiation of contested space.

1. Meaningfully address the housing crisis on reserves through partnerships that prioritize the Indigenous worldview and community priorities. Indigenous housing provision on-reserves is the responsibility of the federal government. The main policies that determine how housing is obtained and created, such as the 1996 On-Reserve Housing Policy, are outdated and largely ineffective as they do not incorporate community preferences (O’Connell, 1965; Pomeroy, 2007). The government’s neglect to provide houses earlier has led to the current housing crisis facing reserves, and presents doing nothing as a policy action that allows waiting to continue. Collaborative practices and community driven initiatives should guide this development. These methods will ensure that the design of new houses meet the needs to First Nations peoples: “Many people feel that more and better housing is necessary not only to preserve family relationships within the home, but also to preserve the community itself. Community members also spoke strongly about the importance of working together on the housing situation and the need for more funding to support community action on housing” (Mamow ki ken da ma win: Searching Together 2015, p.24). Investments in the form of in-kind housing, as well as in capacity development programs will equip communities with the ability to define their own practices in terms of land use and housing development. In essence, the creation of more homes that are appropriate, as well as adequate and suitable, will help make the grey space Yiftachel’s describes a little brighter.

2. Encourage federal investment in more culturally appropriate housing options for First Nations off-reserve who are living in Thunder Bay to promote social inclusion.

The Urban Native Housing Program under Section 95 of the National Housing Act of 1986 intends to “help low income Native households living in an urban area, obtain suitable and affordable housing”, calculating these rents at 25% of before tax income (Native People of Thunder Bay Corporation, 2003). Thunder Bay could leverage this program further to incentivize non-profit Aboriginal housing providers in the city to create more homes. However, this program is treated like any other social housing program, and therefore does not reflect the distinctive needs of Indigenous peoples. Moving forward, the federal government could consider revisiting this program and separating it from the existing suite, providing it with more funding and more flexibility to create culturally appropriate home in urban centres, in partnership with existing Indigenous service providers and urban Indigenous peoples themselves.

3. Address the trade-offs that occur while waiting for housing as identified by community members. Incorporating the lived experiences of First Nations and qualitative data into policy directions will enable new policies to address some of the possible trade-offs that occur while waiting for housing if funding for these homes continues to be a low priority for the government. The creation of new infrastructures on-reserves, like community and recreation centres, could alleviate some of the stress on residents who are living in overcrowded homes by providing them with additional space. Mitigating the challenges that arise while waiting for housing will not only making the waiting period more manageable until massive gains in housing provision are made, but will improve quality of life overall, making this period of uncertainty more bearable.

4. Increase communication between reserves and Thunder Bay through a centralized agency. In their discussion of experiences of First Nations living off-reserve in Winnipeg, Brandon and Peters (2014) discuss the importance of the Eagle Urban Transition Centre (EUTC), which is “one of the only Aboriginal run service agencies of its type across Canada that

help First Nations, Métis and Inuit people when they are making the move to the city” (p.1). The Eagle Transition Centre serves as a predominant pillar for First Nations by helping alleviate the challenges they face when they arrive in the city, particularly focusing on reducing the barriers to housing (Brandon & Peters, 2014). It also facilitates communication to help maintain connections to reserves and home community. It is clear that inappropriate housing on reserves encourage community members to move to Thunder Bay, and that if they move there for a specific purpose, they may be unable to return to their communities. Establishing a similar centre in Thunder Bay would be a meaningful way to ensure that migration to and from reserves is supported by infrastructures, housing, and appropriate services. The EUTC is funded by Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), and perhaps NAN, for example, could fund a similar one in Thunder Bay due to many of the shared circumstances facing First Nations migrants in urban centres.

9.0 Conclusion

Through the exploration of Eabametoong and Nibinamik community members' stories one can more clearly see that waiting for housing is ongoing and requires solutions to mitigate the challenges arise during this period of unknowingness.

The waiting game is therefore twofold. First, the colonial agenda that forced First Nations peoples onto the reserves did not support the sustained evolution of these settlements, which created conditions whereby the supply of housing is inadequate to meet the demand for housing, and the existing stock is grossly inappropriate for a community's unique needs. Secondly, these conditions in turn force First Nations peoples into urban centres, whereby they face additional challenges as these environments, particularly housing options, are often unsupportive of Indigenous cultures and needs as well.

In the larger context of First Nations living in Canada, waiting transgresses boundaries and is a pervasive phenomenon that limits the ability of communities and individuals to reach their full potential in environments that meet and prioritize their needs. Waiting therefore presents itself as overcrowded living conditions that impact the physical and psychological health of residents. Waiting also presents itself as mobility and a lack of permanence, a state of being neither here or there, straddling home communities and seeking to find them in urban centres. Finally, waiting presents itself as a political tool that promises progress but perpetrates frustration and uncertainty. It is within this terrain that the grey space must be addressed. First Nations peoples want to remain in their communities and have the freedom to move across their lands, protesting against the assimilative agenda, therefore they should be able to and be supported in their own planning efforts to ensure no one needs to wait any longer for a home.

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