

## CHAPTER 5

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### *Resettlement, Urbanization, and Rural–Urban Homelessness Geographies in Greenland*

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

On a June 2018 evening in Nuuk, Greenland, with the Arctic summer sun still gleaming, we stood on Steven’s balcony overlooking downtown Nuuk. “One, two, three, four . . . ,” we counted the construction cranes scattered across the skyline. “Five, six, seven, eight . . . nine!” From the vantage point of Steven’s townhouse we were able to count two hands’ worth of cranes, busily assembling new residential high rises and government buildings across the Nuuk skyline. The total number of cranes we counted that evening was only a fraction of those we saw in Nuuk over the course of that summer. A local newspaper ran the headline “Bygge-Boom” (building boom) across its front page, an image that it then featured in poster promotions all summer long. In a participatory photography workshop we held as a part of our ongoing research on housing and homelessness in Nuuk, the topic of rapid development in the city was frequently discussed. Nothing was the same,

and yet so much was: the rural–urban disparities driving the most recent wave of urban development were a familiar reflection of resettlement policies that have framed settlement geographies in Greenland since the earliest days of Danish colonization. What we see today in the city, and what we wish to explore in this chapter, is the mutual process of (re)settlement<sup>1</sup> and urbanization that has, through various programs and over various decades, come to characterize Greenlandic social, cultural, economic, and political landscapes, and that frames the geographies of housing insecurity and homelessness that we explore in our work.

During the 1950s and 1960s the Danish state, together with a Greenlandic council, actively pursued the centralization of previously nomadic Greenlanders (Kalaallit/Inuit).<sup>2</sup> Though (re)settlement policies were enacted to promote Greenlandic participation in the wage economy and facilitate administration by the colonial state, there were profound social and spatial implications as well. Among the key tools to promote settlement were the expansion of a public health program and improved social welfare services, including education, public housing, and income support. The intention was to bring Greenlanders into the administration and culture of the Danish state — including language and culturally-rooted practices of home, health, family, and social organization. The Greenlandic language and traditional culture were undermined through policies like “Danification” (*Danisering*), and select “promising” youth were removed to boarding schools in Denmark. These practices disrupted and dislocated Greenlandic homes, health, family, and community — the effects of which are ongoing today in what scholars articulate as the intergenerational effects of colonialism, namely, negative effects on mental and physical health, family and community relations, sense of place, and cultural identity.

Significantly, Christensen and Hansen and Andersen have suggested that these uneven geographies of social welfare institutions have a critical presence in Arctic homeless pathways, and Greenland is no exception.<sup>3</sup> Those at particular risk of homelessness include low-income northerners who face compounding life challenges, framed in large part by chronic housing need, poor mental health (including trauma), developmental disabilities, addictions, and breakdowns in intimate, family, and community relationships, risk factors that are indelibly tied to the socio-cultural and material legacies of colonialism and modernization in the Arctic.<sup>4</sup> The absence of key health and social supports in villages (*bygder* in Danish and *nunaqarfik*<sup>5</sup> in Kalaallit) and their concentration in urban centres is an important outcome of resettlement that directly affects the (im)mobility of Greenlanders experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness.

Today, Nuuk, with a population of about 18,000, is a city undergoing incredible expansion, building up and out at a pace that is almost impossible to track. The fervent push behind this rapid development, however, is not only to meet the needs of people who currently call the city home, but also the thousands of Greenlanders that the municipality of Sermersooq (which includes Nuuk) and the Greenlandic government plan to resettle in the coming years. Twenty minutes from central Nuuk, a new Sermersooq subdivision — Siorarsiorfik — will be the largest urban development project ever in Greenland, designed to address significant population growth and persistent housing need in the municipality, as well as draw young Greenlanders living abroad back to the country's capital. Two new primary schools, one secondary school, and a 20,000 square metre retail area are also planned. In addition, a large indoor stadium and art museum —

both to be designed by the famous Danish architect Bjarke Ingels — are also proposed. A large tunnel will be constructed to link the new neighbourhood to Nuuk Centre.

As we explore in this chapter, this latest urban expansion plan is part of a very long historical trajectory of (re)settlement and urbanization in Greenland. This trajectory has been a core element in Danish colonial policy in Greenland, and has thus rendered urban and colonial forms and processes largely inextricable. Yet the current push towards an urban Greenland is not being led from outside by Danish settlement policy, but rather by a single Greenlandic municipality. In contemporary Greenland, an ever-sharpening urban focus has become central to the self-rule government, and in this way resettlement and urbanization have become key strategies towards self-determination, decolonization, and, ultimately, total independence from the Danish state. These urban aspirations have been achieved, we suggest here, by both passive and overt urbanization strategies aimed over the years at rendering village life economically unsustainable.

Greenland is the world's largest island, covering an expanse of more than two million square kilometres and stretching from Cape Farewell in the south to Oodaq Island in the high North. Approximately 80 per cent of the land surface is covered by an ice sheet. Greenland's 56,000 inhabitants are settled in 17 towns and some 60 smaller settlements primarily along the west and east coast, which since 2018 have been administratively organized into five municipal regions (see Figure 5.1). Notably, there is no national road system, and therefore transportation between settlements is achieved primarily by helicopter, small airplane, boat, dogsled, and snowmobile. Not surprisingly, transportation is expensive, which further limits mobility between communities.

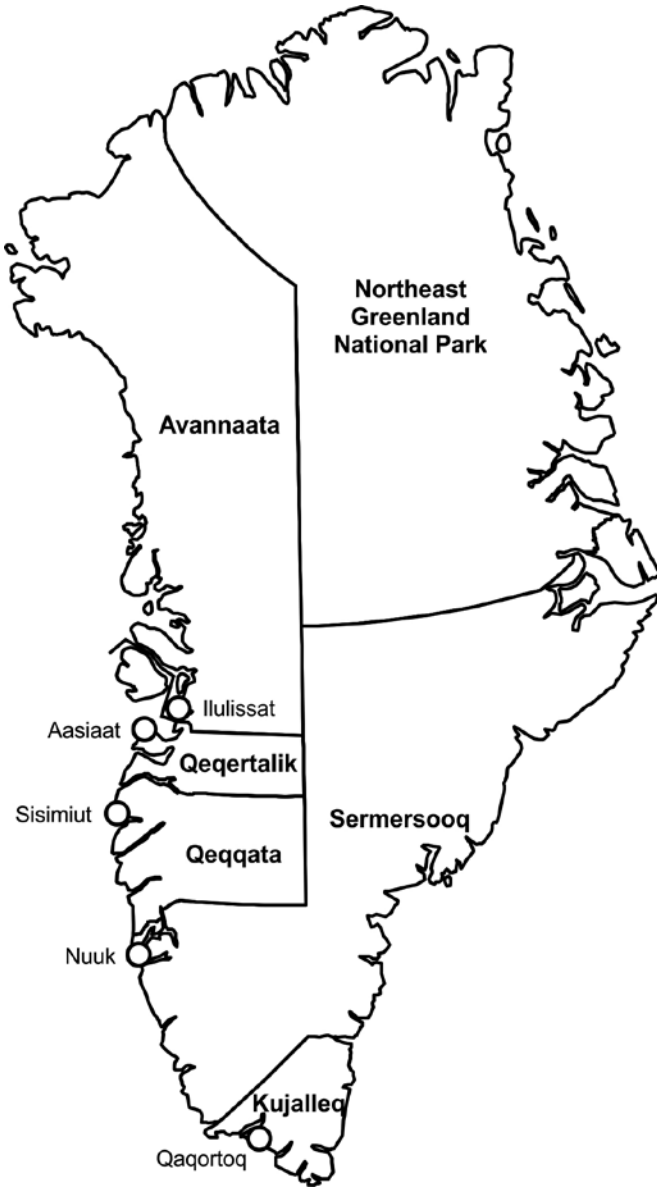


Figure 5.1. Greenland's main regions. Map by Jonathan Carter.

About 90 per cent of Greenland's population is ethnically Greenlandic (Kalaallit/Inuit) and the remainder is mainly Danish.<sup>6</sup> While Greenlandic is the country's official language, Danish is also widely spoken.<sup>7</sup> However, Hansen et al. note significant disparities in Danish literacy levels between villages and urban communities in Greenland.<sup>8</sup> Today, Greenland is self-governed (hereafter referred to as Self Rule). While Greenland is still included within the Danish Realm, the country has autonomy over its central governmental activities, including social policy, education, health, economy, and housing. Greenland has universal health care and is considered a welfare society following the Scandinavian model, meaning that taxpayers pay close to half their income in taxes in exchange for a wide spectrum of publicly administered services.

The population is highly urbanized, with well over 30 per cent of Greenlanders living in the capital city, Nuuk, and over 85 per cent living in the four largest settlements combined. Thus, towns and cities play a significant role in the lives of Greenlanders.<sup>9</sup> While Greenland's towns and cities are not large in population relative to urban centres in Europe or elsewhere in the world, its largest settlements constitute important administrative, political, economic, educational, and social centres. "The definition of a town in Greenland," according to Sejersen, "is thus not only related to its size, but moreover to its importance as a centre."<sup>10</sup> The trend towards urbanization in Greenland is only growing, with urban populations rising while the number of rural dwellers is on the decline.<sup>11</sup> This is due in part to the fact that Greenlandic towns have been singled out as drivers of the kind of social change sought after by the Self Rule government.<sup>12</sup> At a referendum in 2008, roughly 75 per cent of the Greenlandic population voted yes

to a law giving more self-rule to Greenland, which was later approved by the Danish parliament for implementation in 2009. This move necessitated an aggressive and clearly defined approach to self-determination and independence. At the same time, to finance greater independence from Denmark, the Self Rule government has largely looked to industrialization to lessen its dependency on the annual block grant from Denmark.<sup>13</sup> Speculation around the potential for industrial development has been heightened as a result of possible outcomes surrounding climate change, which suggest easier access to Greenland's resources and placing the country in a strategic position globally vis-à-vis oil and gas development as well as the shipping industry.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, while the Self Rule government plods ahead with its Sermersooq expansion plans in Nuuk, we are interested in what continued rural–urban migration, urbanization, and resettlement mean for Greenlanders experiencing housing insecurity and forms of homelessness. We also seek to explore how the concept of welfare colonialism can be used to interpret the Danish colonial focus on resettlement in order to facilitate the extension of social welfare programs into Greenlandic lives, how social welfare here was intended as a main driver in cultural assimilation and “Danification,” and ultimately how the emerging rural–urban welfare geography underlies homeless (im)mobilities in Greenland. Much of the literature on Arctic rural–urban migration has identified this phenomenon as motivated by the pursuit of educational and employment opportunities. Yet in our work on housing insecurity and homelessness in Alaska, the Canadian North, and Greenland, we see a second stream occurring among those who are marginalized from educational and employment opportunities and reliant on institutionalized health and social services.

This has had a particular impact in recent years on Greenlandic youth, who are increasingly represented among those living without secure housing in Nuuk.<sup>15</sup> Finally, we argue that in Greenland's pursuit of modernization and independence through urbanization, without adequate social policy responses to chronic housing need and increasing visible homelessness in Nuuk, a significant number of Greenlandic citizens continue to be marginalized through resettlement. Though the policies and political powers have shifted over the years, and Greenland is now self-governed, the Self Rule government today has done very little to improve or plan for the housing and social welfare needs of socially marginalized Greenlanders.

This chapter emerges from our larger study aimed at understanding the social dimensions of homelessness in Nuuk, Greenland, which began in 2015.<sup>16</sup> We begin with a brief overview of the history of colonialism, resettlement, and urbanization in the Greenlandic context, with a particular focus on the capital city of Nuuk. We also introduce the concept of welfare colonialism and its role in shaping these geographies. The colonial experience in Greenland has been facilitated through the social welfare state, a process that involved significant manipulation of the ways in which Indigenous people organized themselves spatially and socially while simultaneously implicating them in the affairs, desires, and decision-making of state powers in Denmark and then the emerging Greenlandic elite. Thus, the processes of urbanization cannot be disentangled from the larger context of welfare colonialism and its effects on the health and social geographies of the Greenlandic people. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of key themes from our research in Nuuk to illustrate how welfare colonialism and passive and overt urbanization policies intertwine



with the absence of social policy on housing and homelessness to exacerbate homelessness in the capital city.

## **COLONIALISM, RESETTLEMENT, AND URBANIZATION IN GREENLAND**

Greenland was first colonized by Denmark in 1721. Historically, Greenlandic people lived largely nomadic lives, moving across the physical and spiritual bounds of their territories according to the seasons and the availability of the animal and plant resources upon which their lives depended.<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of the colonial period, trade was based primarily on whaling, but by the closing of the eighteenth century the Royal Greenlandic Trade Company (a state company formed in 1776) had established a large number of small trading posts along the west coast.<sup>18</sup> The Company offered basic provisions to Greenlandic hunters in exchange for skins and furs. The Danish state favoured this decentralized settlement pattern at the time, believing it supported a high level of self-sufficiency and facilitated trade in products of the hunt, while still encouraging traditional subsistence lifestyles.<sup>19</sup> Of course, this was a naive way of thinking, as Greenlanders were increasingly implicated in Danish trade, religion, and social life, not to mention the marriages, families, and friendships that resulted from relationships between Greenlanders and Danes.

However, the decentralized settlement pattern was a thorn in the side of the Christian missionaries, who felt it was prohibitive to religious education and cultural assimilation.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the mission encouraged Greenlandic concentration at the trading posts where missionaries were already present.<sup>21</sup> These conflicting settlement strategies enmeshed Greenlandic people into complicated

relationships with both the church and the state as they came to depend on the mission and trade for help and support. Many of the emerging colonial towns constituted centres for larger regions and were indeed attractive for many Greenlanders due to the trade goods, job opportunities, welfare system, and social security compared to the conditions in the smaller communities and trading posts.<sup>22</sup> This structure of colonial establishments (“colonies”), villages, and outposts stayed unchanged until the years following World War II.

Similar to experiences in Alaska and the Canadian North, the period around and following World War II brought about unprecedented transformation for Greenland. During the war, Greenland was entirely cut off from Denmark, and relationships with the US as well as Canada were established. After the war Denmark signed a new constitution that changed Greenland’s status as a colony of Denmark to that of a province, and gave Danish citizenship to all Greenlanders. As Stenbaek explains, this shift in relationship led many Danes to believe that Greenlanders (or “northern Danes”) and Greenland should be remade into a northern Denmark — a social, spatial, and indeed cultural reflection of the state of Denmark.<sup>23</sup> As such, “a pseudo-blueprint of Danish society — its institutions, its architecture, its educational system, etc. — should be impressed on Greenland.”<sup>24</sup> A shift in ideology thus occurred during and following the war as the Danish state saw the economic, administrative, and geopolitical advantages of centralization and of the assimilation of Arctic peoples into Danish cultural practices and modes of social organization. World War II became “the threshold between the old and the new” in Greenland.<sup>25</sup>

The most aggressive resettlement and modernization period occurred from the 1950s to 1970s, under consecutive reform

schemes launched in 1950 (G50) and 1964 (G60).<sup>26</sup> These two parliamentary reports — the Report from the Commission for Greenland, published in 1950 and later referred to as G50, and the Report from the Greenland Committee of 1960, published in 1964 and referred to as G60 — were authorized by the Danish government to review the possibilities for development in Greenland. Danish and Greenlandic politicians believed the industrialization of fish production to be an efficient way to improve Greenlandic standards of living. To improve the level of welfare, education, living standards, and the labour market, movement to a handful of chosen towns along the west coast was encouraged by the Danish authorities. Though families were initially invited to relocate through promises of new housing and better economic prospects, many communities were closed down outright, or investments were withheld to encourage a concentration of the population in centres of industrial development, where modern educational, social, and health establishments could be centralized.<sup>27</sup>

Under G60, economic development in Greenland was concentrated in the coastal towns. Between 1952 and 1963, approximately 3,000 households, which included families and extended families, were moved from smaller coastal settlements of roughly 100–200 inhabitants each to fast-growing towns as part of this modernization process. Substantial investments were channelled into infrastructure, housing, production facilities, and education as well as health institutions.<sup>28</sup> Towns became centres of construction work on a previously unknown scale, resulting in abrupt changes to their physical layout, with the building of factories and concrete apartment buildings, as well as roads and other infrastructure. As Sejersen writes, “the construction and running of these fast-growing towns . . . were primarily in the hands of Danes

and, increasingly, the majority of Greenlanders felt like bystanders in the development of their own homeland.”<sup>29</sup>

Although improvements to Greenlandic social welfare were the stated objective, this rapid resettlement had the effect of alienating people from their culture and livelihoods, imposing living conditions that people were not used to and not culturally prepared for, and led to new social problems.<sup>30</sup> Housing needs were calculated as the total required for renewal, migration, and population increase.<sup>31</sup> The new apartment units built in the coastal towns were very small, and were designed primarily for small or nuclear families, a practice that continues today, despite the fact that many Greenlandic families lived (and continue to live) in multi-generational settings. Promises of housing and employment, including bloc housing projects in Nuuk, were central to these resettlement strategies. One of the infamous symbols of this period, these high-density apartment buildings, lined in rows in the centre of Nuuk’s downtown, were built to house the hundreds of families who were resettled from outlying settlements. The new housing and development plans emphasized high-density housing programs in regional centres alongside the expansion of social welfare services, which included the implementation of public health programs, education, and income support.<sup>32</sup> These housing projects were modern (by the standards of that era) apartment blocks with sanitation, electricity, and central heating, and larger indoor spaces were part of a broader modernization project in Greenland from 1950 to 1980.<sup>33</sup> The apartments were designed for families engaged in modern employment, and were established by Danish-organized political committees with little appreciation for the needs and wants of traditional Greenlandic society. For example, the housing was not suitable for traditional subsistence

activities like butchering a seal, although they did have such modern facilities as sanitation, running water, and electricity. Meanwhile, massive resettlement actually resulted in limitations for the employment and housing opportunities promised by the state, as migration increased competition for the limited supply of both.<sup>34</sup>

These towns were created by direct intervention from the Danish state, planned and partly executed in Danish-led political forums, and finally erected in Greenland by a workforce that, to a large degree, came from Denmark.<sup>35</sup> These workers came to build houses for families from closed-down villages who were moving into towns in Greenland, but these settlements were not really created with the needs of their inhabitants in mind. Instead, they were intended as solutions to the administrative and economic problems of the Danish state.<sup>36</sup> At this time, Greenland experienced what has been described as the period of its most direct colonial oppression, despite the fact that it was no longer legally considered a colony of Denmark, as the welfare system was introduced and Danish intervention was at its highest.<sup>37</sup> Not surprisingly, Greenlanders started to perceive the urbanization process as a colonial project even though the colonial status of Greenland had been formally abolished. The town became the symbolic, as well as concrete, manifestation of Western cultural and political dominance and the arena for assimilation of Greenlanders into a Danish way of thinking and behaving. A similar sense of disempowerment over decisions that have such bearing on daily life can be seen in experiences of relocation and resettlement in Newfoundland and Labrador (see Côté and Pottie-Sherman, Chapter 4).

Critics of G50 and G60 argued that the Greenlandic population was denied a choice in the matter of Greenlandic development, and that the success of the resettlement and centralization

policy was ensured through the denial of any possibility for development in the small settlements.<sup>38</sup> As Deth Petersen writes:

schools and stores were closed down, breadwinners moved away, and the remaining people had to seriously consider whether they had a future in a community whose economic and social organization was partly destroyed by the resettlement process. Those in an economically weak position, such as widows, lost an important source of their livelihood, because donations of meat and other kinds of reciprocal help, depending on the surplus production of the good hunter, had been reduced.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1970s, when the political movement of young Greenlanders pushed for more self-determination as well as societal and cultural processes based on Greenlandic values — the so-called Greenlandization (*Grøndlandisering*) — the key words were: decentralization, participation, and co-operative ownership.<sup>40</sup> When Home Rule was consequently introduced in 1979, a financial and political focus was therefore put on a decentralized settlement structure, with an emphasis on small places to compensate for years of negligence by the Danish state.<sup>41</sup> However, the timing of this return to small settlement life was ill-fated: during the 1980s, a shift in sea temperature made expansion of the shrimp fishing industry possible, which then refocused the attention of government away from small settlements and towards the shrimp-based economy in the coastal towns.<sup>42</sup> This, along with efforts to manage the mounting challenges of an aging housing stock and, at the same time, to bolster increased independence from Denmark, led to renewed resettlement and urbanization efforts.

### **CONTEMPORARY RESETTLEMENT AND URBANIZATION: PASSIVE AND OVERT CENTRALIZATION**

Though the 1950s to 1970s brought about significant and unprecedented change to Greenlandic settlement patterns, a prioritization of the urban and an encouragement of rural–urban resettlement persist today. Centralization now continues through both passive and overt policies meant to disincentivize rural life and encourage urbanization. The geography of settlement in Greenland from its beginning was built around the interests of the Danish state, not around economic sustainability. Though the social welfare state has allowed for the persistence of small villages, the lack of sustainable local wage economies has meant that when services and investment are pulled back, it becomes financially difficult for local residents to stay.<sup>43</sup> This kind of tactic has been employed time and again in Greenland in an effort to encourage migration to Greenland’s largest centres. The promotion of an uneven geography of key health and social welfare services on the part of the Danish government, and now the Self Rule government is, we argue, a passive form of resettlement policy that acts as a continuation of early Danish colonial policy in significant ways. Similarly, Ervin postulated that federal policy in Canada promoted the incipient urbanization of Arctic and sub-Arctic regions, encouraging the concentration of northern people into settlements built on southern models, where northern Indigenous people experienced minority group status and resulting marginality.<sup>44</sup>

The social welfare state and its uneven spatialization have been central to resettlement efforts in Greenland. Attending to the socio-spatial consequences of this geography is central to understanding the contemporary geographies of housing insecurity

and homelessness. Three conceptual bodies work to explain the role of entanglements of resettlement, social welfare, and institutional geographies, and their effects on marginalized Greenlanders. The first is the concept of welfare colonialism.<sup>45</sup> Danish colonial attitudes in the mid-twentieth century established a relationship between Indigenous people and the state that can be understood as welfare colonialism, a concept first articulated by Paine to describe the uneven political and economic landscape for Indigenous peoples in the Canadian North.<sup>46</sup> Since then, the term has been taken up to describe more widely the policies and practices through which liberal democratic (settler) governments both recognize the citizenship of Indigenous peoples vis-à-vis access to welfare benefits, and at the same time effectively deny their citizenship by nurturing their dependency on the state.<sup>47</sup> Through the workings of welfare colonialism, an unequal relationship of dependency is established, through which social welfare programs are then rationalized and used to equalize the material conditions of Indigenous peoples while preserving and upholding the dominant, state-driven ideological framework. Of course, the workings of social welfare colonialism have been enacted in different ways across colonial contexts, and are also uneven in their effects within and between Indigenous communities.

Second, those whose lives have been most significantly altered by way of these relations have experienced, and continue to experience, these dynamics of dependency in particular ways. One such way is through institutionalization, which is in effect the management of the social and health outcomes of colonialism, and the direct result of culturally and contextually inappropriate social welfare programs that fail to effectively address the actual roots of the problems they seek to remedy.<sup>48</sup>



Third, service dependency gives a geography to institutionalization in the sense that it serves to explain the socio-spatial consequences of institutional change and unevenness, namely that of the rural–urban migration of Greenlanders most vulnerable to homelessness. The concept of service dependency speaks specifically to the relationships of poverty, health and social support needs, and mobility. In the past, academic interest in service dependency has focused on the phenomenon of “service-dependent population ghettos” in North American inner cities, which are spatial concentrations of welfare populations and the facilities designed to assist them. Here, visible homelessness is a direct consequence of the failures of the deinstitutionalization process.<sup>49</sup>

However, while the service dependency literature is focused on large urban centres in southern Canada and the US, where there is considerable diversity between neighbourhoods, the concept offers potential for understanding homelessness and urbanization in the Arctic. Urban centres like Nuuk, or Iqaluit and Yellowknife in the Canadian North, do not have similar neighbourhood diversity, but they instead act as areas of concentrated services for people already in the communities, as well as for those from smaller, outlying settlement communities. In this way, service dependency facilitates an examination of the social and institutional factors that contribute to rural–urban migration among those at risk of homelessness, as well as the rising visibility of homelessness in Arctic urban centres.

Extension of the social welfare state to Greenland following World War II was a key strategy in what was effectively an ongoing Danish colonial interest in Greenland. The centralization of key health and social services in Greenlandic towns and cities produced an uneven institutional geography across Greenland, one

that is particularly important to the lives of marginalized Greenlanders who are at highest risk of housing insecurity and forms of homelessness. Under the Self Rule government in Greenland today, urbanization is facilitated through deliberate policies. The most important change in this direction is probably that the 18 Greenlandic municipalities were merged into five large municipalities in 2018, and as a consequence most of the city administration and associated jobs have been gathered in the five municipal centres. Not only has there been a significant centralization of a number of public functions where most publicly or semi-publicly owned corporate offices and administrations gradually have been gathered in Nuuk, but this in turn has had a significant impact on the centralization of post-secondary education, public housing, and health and social services. Parallel to the centralization of municipalities has been the ongoing centralization of health facilities since 2011.<sup>50</sup> The 16 former health districts were amalgamated into five health regions. This centralization was justified by economic advantages and administrative arguments that it would improve the quality of health care.

While important social welfare functions have been concentrated in the core centres of these five municipalities, the implementation of a simultaneous “real costs” policy has also played a key role in encouraging rural–urban movement. While Hendriksen argued that the social welfare state previously served to facilitate small settlement dwelling due to subsidy programs that supported village/settlement life, particularly the uniform price system, policy change in 2005 resulted in a partial reform (*huslejere reform*) of this system.<sup>51</sup> The uniform price system subsidized electricity, heating, and water for the smaller communities, but since 2005 this has been gradually clawed back to create prices in the smaller

communities that reflect “real costs” — a reform geared to benefit the economic dynamics in the towns and to promote a transfer of populations from local communities to the more competitive towns.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the smaller communities increasingly find themselves stigmatized and isolated due to changes in the transportation structure and the pricing system. A similar sense of rural stigmatization is found in the Newfoundland case illustrated by Côté and Pottie-Sherman in Chapter 4, where public discourse pits urban Newfoundlanders against those living in small, isolated island settlements reliant on subsidized ferry services.

Framing the landscape of housing insecurity and homelessness in Greenland are the country’s historical and contemporary dimensions of resettlement and rural-to-urban mobility. Though the resettlement plans of the mid-twentieth century were enacted to promote Greenlandic participation in the wage economy and facilitate administration by the colonial state, they also had profound social and spatial implications.<sup>53</sup> Centralization policies put into motion a distinct rural–urban geography in Greenland, a geography that frames the emergence of visible forms of homelessness in Greenlandic urban centres. The shifting spatial dynamics of the Greenlandic social welfare state have particular consequences for those who are without adequate education or who depend on health and social services. The very institutions that are central in the lives of Greenlanders living with housing need or homelessness are precisely those that are increasingly centralized in urban Greenland: public housing, emergency shelters (including those related to family violence), the child welfare system, and the spectrum of health services. It is this relationship between historical and contemporary resettlement and homeless geographies that we want to examine here.

## **HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS IN GREENLAND**

Homelessness as a Greenlandic social phenomenon is, with few exceptions, presented as predominantly urban and largely Nuuk-centred.<sup>54</sup> A municipal count in 2017 cites an estimate of approximately 878 people living homeless in Greenland as a whole.<sup>55</sup> The absence of a standardized definition of homelessness in Greenland makes it difficult to assess who is homeless and to draw meaningful comparisons between village/settlement and urban communities, or to assess the scale and scope of homelessness within Greenland as a whole. In Nuuk, the conservative estimate of people living under a more permanent state of homelessness is 100–200.<sup>56</sup> Our research, however, has uncovered anecdotal evidence from NGO-based support providers that the number of homeless individuals in Nuuk alone affects upward of 300 people.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, we have found four main experiences of homelessness: (1) men over 30 years of age who struggle with substance abuse and do not have housing; (2) youth with family, social, or economic problems who migrate from small settlements to larger centres in hope of new opportunities; (3) women who either are single or no longer have custody of their children, and who have often been victims of domestic violence; and (4) men and women over 55 who have been evicted from their housing after failure to pay rent.<sup>58</sup> It is predominantly the second and third groups whose experiences of homelessness are framed by the kinds of passive and overt resettlement policy we describe in this chapter.

Recent efforts on the part of the Self Rule government to promote resettlement to urban centres have included a steady decline in funding for housing in smaller settlements and the redirection of those funds towards public housing in the larger urban centres,

mainly Nuuk.<sup>59</sup> Public housing in the Greenlandic context, however, does not necessarily mean it is housing for low-income Greenlanders. In Greenland, housing is viewed as a matter of public responsibility and consists mainly of public housing. Thus, the bulk of rental housing in Nuuk, and in Greenland as a whole, is public. Rental housing in Greenland, in other words, is largely administered in one of two ways: through public housing or through public-sector employment. To access public housing, which is administered by Greenland's public housing authority, INI (*Inatsisartut Inissiaatileqatigiifik*), one can add one's name to the housing list starting at age 18. These waiting lists, however, can be incredibly long. In Nuuk, for example, it can take up to 15 years to get an apartment on one's own. Meanwhile, certain jobs within the public sector (i.e., teacher, nurse, university professor) come with apartment assignments. As long as one maintains the post, one gets to keep the assigned rental apartment. Alternatives to the public housing waiting list include (1) getting an education in order to find a job with an assigned apartment or (2) purchasing a private house or apartment, which tend to be both expensive and in short supply. Thus, the Greenlandic housing landscape can be highly problematic for those Greenlanders who do not have adequate education or employment. As several scholars have found, in Greenland there is a distinct village/settlement–urban disparity to Danish literacy, education levels, and employment outcomes, leaving those who migrate from small settlements to the larger centres at a significant disadvantage in the employment and housing markets.<sup>60</sup>

However, the factors contributing to homelessness in Greenland are not only a matter of unemployment, material poverty, or housing insecurity; rather, these factors tightly intersect with trauma

and other psychological issues, such as addiction, domestic violence, and other forms of abuse.<sup>61</sup> Hansen and Andersen have documented the existence of vast social issues connected to homelessness in Greenland, such as abuse, problematic upbringing, poor social resources, unemployment, and so on.<sup>62</sup> In addition, a critical linkage exists between the housing situation in Greenland, characterized in particular by chronic housing need, and the emergence of homelessness. For example, as noted above, the housing stock in Greenland consists mainly of public housing, and some of this housing is in poor condition or located in communities where employment, educational, and cultural opportunities are in decline. Yet, alongside the geography of worsening housing need is the continued process of centralization in Greenland.

While the literature on Greenlandic homelessness, though sparse, touches on the dynamics of social marginalization, very little explicitly conceptualizes homelessness in Greenland within its specific geographical, cultural, or social context. For example, research suggests that village/settlement-to-urban and Greenland-to-Denmark migration is a significant factor in Greenland homeless geographies, but the dynamics of rural-to-urban mobility and its role in Greenlandic homelessness have not been well explored.<sup>63</sup> Rasmussen surveyed a representative 1,550 people on the motivations behind their village/settlement-to-urban move.<sup>64</sup> Top responses included education and employment, living conditions, social network, leisure opportunities, and access to public services.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the majority of Greenlanders engaging in this migration were young people between the ages of 15 and 25, which reflects a similar observation by Hansen and Andersen that youth at risk of homelessness were likely to engage in such a move.<sup>66</sup>

With the lack of investment in economic and educational opportunities in many of the small settlements, young people in these communities are forced to seek these opportunities in regional urban centres or beyond. Hansen and Andersen's study, as well as ours, reveals a growing trend of youth migration to the cities, particularly Nuuk, and yet young people are doing so without housing.

Meanwhile, the challenges of maintaining an adequate public housing stock in Nuuk and other regional centres have led to the adoption of more punitive housing policies. For example, Hansen and Andersen also indicate an increase in evictions from public housing between 2005 and 2013, which were due largely to increasing enforcement of rent and housing rules in light of diminishing housing stock.<sup>67</sup>

Uneven rural–urban geographies, intergenerational impacts of colonialism, and social welfare dependency have been observed in the context of homelessness in Greenland, and many of these themes are directly related to critical social issues visible within Greenlandic welfare society today, including a rise in the number of children facing social problems and violence against women.<sup>68</sup> Underneath these immense challenges is the escalation in homelessness. In fact, housing insecurity has been identified as a critical element in violence against women in Greenland.<sup>69</sup> Yet curiously, homelessness is not a prioritized social political issue in Greenland.

Our interviews with women experiencing homelessness in Nuuk also indicate a gendered dimension to rural–urban resettlement and housing insecurity. In particular, we have found that homeless women are an especially neglected group in the spectrum of Greenlandic social policies and services.<sup>70</sup> Raadet for

Socialt Udsatte (The Authority for the Socially Marginalized) has previously declared that women constitute one of the most vulnerable groups of people living with homelessness in the country.<sup>71</sup> Yet Nuuk does not have specific strategies aimed at securing a safe shelter for women in marginalized situations, despite approximately 750 reports of domestic disturbances in the city annually.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, there is nothing in place for women moving to the city to escape intimate partner violence in their home communities, a narrative that presented itself frequently in our interviews with women experiencing homelessness as well as with frontline support providers. Chronic housing need has been shown to exacerbate intimate partner violence in northern communities in Canada, where similar efforts to leave violent homes connect to women's homelessness in northern urban centres.<sup>73</sup> Though there is support for mothers with young children and elderly women, very little exists for single women or women living in or leaving violent relationships.<sup>74</sup>

One further step or strategy is for people to leave the country entirely to seek opportunities elsewhere within the Kingdom of Denmark (which includes the Faroe Islands). This typically means travelling to Denmark, where Greenlanders hold citizenship and where more than 14,000 Greenlanders currently reside.<sup>75</sup> Yet this kind of move does not always mean a brighter future. Recently, the Danish Council of Social Marginalization released a follow-up to a previous report on Greenlandic women living homeless in Denmark.<sup>76</sup> The report describes problematic conditions for these women, such as language barriers, issues with access to education and employment, and disempowered social networks. Thus far, there has been little joint effort between Greenland and Denmark to offer public help to or safeguard for the homeless



Greenlandic women in Denmark, leaving them in the care of local Danish NGOs.<sup>77</sup>

Several signs suggest that homelessness in Nuuk is set to increase over the coming years. Employment and educational opportunities, as well as cultural activities, are increasingly concentrated in the capital city. The municipality of Sermersooq, which includes Nuuk, is allocating more land for housing, but not for the low-income groups. A principle in Greenland's democratic welfare society is that the people affected by political decisions are given a chance to voice their concerns through public forums. However, in recent years there has been a shift in the political climate towards the kinds of neo-liberal, market-oriented policies seen in Alaska and increasingly in the Canadian North, and decision-making about housing policy is evolving within the political environment with no public hearings. Despite the fact that Greenland does have a small organization of homeless people, homeless people are rarely included in development of policy, such as the policy that governs the daily operations of the public shelter in Nuuk.<sup>78</sup>

## **RESETTLEMENT, URBANIZATION, AND HOMELESSNESS**

Several themes emerge to illustrate the ways in which resettlement and urbanization policies, over time and through both Danish colonial and Greenland Self Rule administrations, have laid the foundation for visible homelessness in Nuuk. First, in stark contrast to policy attention towards the encouragement of rural–urban movement stands the total absence of social policy on homelessness. There is currently no anti-homelessness social policy in existence at the municipal or national level in Greenland.

The limitations of the ideological belief in housing as a public responsibility are revealed in the absence of social policy directed specifically towards the Greenlandic homeless population. At the same time, we observe the entrenching of significant class divides within Greenland through housing policy: public housing is largely accessible through education or employment, and as a result, class divides are reinforced through housing policy (or the lack of housing policy) as often only those with employment or student status have access to housing. Meanwhile, a multitude of push and pull factors, many of them caused or exacerbated by the centralization policies of the Danish and then the Greenlandic state, encourage the movement of Greenlanders to urban centres. The lack of a social policy response to homelessness in Nuuk results in a holding pattern for those who find themselves without suitable, secure shelter. A very limited number of beds in a municipal shelter are the only option provided by the state, with no emphasis on transitional or supportive housing and associated programs.

Second, the lack of engagement by the public sector has been enabled in some sense by the active engagement of the non-profit sector in programs and services for the housing insecure and homeless.<sup>79</sup> In fact, these new forms of urban community and caring organizations are a positive outcome of the trends towards an increasingly urban Greenland. Local NGOs collaborate with one another to provide services to people living homeless in Nuuk, and they also express a common agenda to empower homeless people and provide forums and networks for people within the environment to voice their concerns. NoINI, Kofoeds Skole, the local chapter of the Red Cross, and Frelsens Hæri (Salvation Army) are filling the gaps in public-sector support, and what is

particularly interesting and problematic here is that much of the funding is provided through foreign sources, local fundraising, or a very, very few short-term pockets of funding from the municipal government. If the headquarters for these organizations determined different priorities and refocused their funds elsewhere, the consequences would be disastrous for Nuuk and Greenland as a whole. Significantly, there is very little funding and policy direction from the national government. This is a big concern because housing and other social supports are delivered by municipalities, and with little to no co-ordination or follow-up between municipalities there is a need for more leadership from the Self Rule government. With little federal involvement, the onus falls on the municipalities and does not reflect the national geography of homelessness. Some initial research has been conducted on the developing individual and collective actions of Nuuk NGOs, although it is still at an early stage.<sup>80</sup>

Third, the village/settlement–urban migration patterns of people living without secure housing in Nuuk are bound up in key institutional geographies. In particular, we have heard stories from youth who have been released from boarding homes without housing in Nuuk, men and women who have been sent to Nuuk for psychiatric care and then released without housing, men and women sent to Nuuk for hospital care and then released without housing, men going to the jail but then released, again without housing, and finally women who have migrated to Nuuk to escape violence at home, only to encounter tremendous difficulty in accessing housing once in Nuuk. All told, these geographies reflect the reframing of the intergenerational social and health effects of rapid socio-cultural change and ongoing colonial frameworks as sites for institutional intervention.

Fourth, homelessness as a Greenlandic social policy issue is, with few exceptions, presented as a predominantly urban, and largely Nuuk-centred, phenomenon. Another related factor is the subtle administrative process of prioritizing public housing in the larger urban cities, mainly Nuuk. Therefore, the urban focus is not limited to the facilitation of the wage economy, but also to the administration of health and social services. That homelessness is seen as a distinctly urban issue becomes self-fulfilling or re-enforcing. In order to understand, and ameliorate, visible forms of homelessness in Nuuk, we must expand our focus outside urban bounds to fully attend to the significance of rural–urban dynamics. Moreover, Nuuk is enmeshed in rural–urban, Greenland–Denmark dynamics that extend beyond northern bounds, particularly along historical or contemporary colonial-administrative relations.

## **CONCLUSION**

On flights out of Nuuk that summer in 2018, there was an in-flight Air Greenland magazine in the seat pocket. Inside was a glossy display of images promoting Nuuk as the cornerstone of urban Greenland — filled with coverage of the emerging new Greenlandic cuisine food scene and modern Greenlandic fashion — side by side with a feature-length article on what resource development could mean for the Greenlandic economy. Though the Self Rule government's plans for urban growth differ from the historical objectives of Danish-sanctioned resettlement, both administrations have used resettlement as a means to promote human territoriality. For contemporary Greenland, urbanization is instrumental in promoting greater independence and autonomy from Denmark, as it cuts down on social welfare administration

costs and facilitates the concentration and accumulation of economic resources. Yet in examining the historical and contemporary dimensions of resettlement in Greenland, we find ourselves questioning the agency of socio-economically marginalized Greenlanders in contemporary patterns of rural–urban migration, given the forms of passive and overt incentivization that the Danish and Greenlandic states have imposed over time to encourage centralization. While Greenlanders were excluded from the political decision-making and settlement planning of the Danish colonial state, today’s self-governed Greenland is itself exclusionary towards those Greenlanders who have been unable, for various reasons, to fully participate in and benefit from contemporary Greenland society.

Indeed, as Pottie-Sherman, Côté, and LeDrew suggest in Chapter 1, the true costs — economic, political, socio-cultural — of resettlement projects have been largely underestimated, or rather under-appreciated. In particular, we are troubled by the contemporary ways in which the social welfare state has been spatialized unevenly, resulting in a manipulation of vulnerabilities entrenched through welfare colonial forms. These vulnerabilities are particularly significant among those Greenlanders experiencing homelessness, and they are woven throughout the narratives of homelessness shared with us in our research. In this way, the ongoing legacies of (re)settlement are evident, as the intergenerational effects of early resettlement policy underlie the health and social support needs of those Greenlanders experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness in Nuuk today. Loo, in Chapter 2, also explores the contemporary legacies of historical, state-sponsored relocation programs, deftly illustrating how the “will to improve” through resettlement eventually conspired with neo-liberal

aspirations more firmly rooted in reducing administrative costs, regardless of the broader social costs. At the same time, resettlement and urbanization are representative of the welfare colonial process as Denmark sought to transform Greenland into a northern image of itself, much in the same way that Withers, in Chapter 3, describes resettlement as symbolic of broader cultural disruptions in Newfoundland.

Yet this is not merely a story of Danish colonial policy. Rather, as we have illustrated in this chapter, present-day urban policy is being crafted and implemented by the Greenlandic Self Rule government. Moreover, this government has been slow to develop a social policy response to housing insecurity and homelessness. This suggests that the dynamics of welfare colonialism, and how passive and overt forms of centralization manipulate service-dependent and housing-insecure Greenlanders, have been entrenched in a trajectory that spans Danish and Greenlandic administrations. It also suggests that many of the spatial and structural inequities imposed by Danish colonial policy and planning in Greenland are tremendously difficult to dismantle. Thus, as Nuuk continues to expand at a fervent pace, and an urban Greenland is promoted to local and international audiences, there is an urgent need for social policy that directly addresses the homelessness in Greenland at a national scale that recognizes the historical geographies underlying what is commonly understood to be a contemporary phenomenon. In fact, housing insecurity and homelessness in Greenland today cannot be extricated from the broader, historical, welfare colonial context. State efforts to encourage resettlement to Nuuk must include comprehensive and robust efforts to ensure the inclusion of all Greenlanders in its urban self-image.

## NOTES

- 1 We use the term “(re)settlement” with brackets to highlight the often simultaneous colonial processes of settlement and resettlement in the Greenlandic context. The Danish state implemented extensive settlement programs in the early colonial period, followed by historical and contemporary resettlement programs under both Danish colonial and Greenlandic Self Rule governments.
- 2 Jens Dahl, “Identity, Urbanization and Political Demography in Greenland,” *Acta Borealia* 27, no. 2 (2010): 125–40; Frank Sejersen, “Urbanization, Landscape Appropriation and Climate Change in Greenland,” *Acta Borealia* 27, no. 2 (2010): 167–88.
- 3 Julia Christensen, “Homeless in a Homeland: Housing (in)Security and Homelessness in Inuvik and Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada” (PhD diss., McGill University, 2011); K.E. Hansen and H.T. Andersen, *Hjemløshedi Grønland [Homelessness in Greenland]* (Aalborg, Denmark: Statens Byggeforskningsinstitut, University of Aalborg, 2013).
- 4 Peter Bjerregaard and Tine Curtis, “Cultural Change and Mental Health in Greenland: The Association of Childhood Conditions, Language, and Urbanization with Mental Health and Suicidal Thoughts among the Inuit of Greenland,” *Social Science & Medicine* 54, no. 1 (2002): 33–48.
- 5 *Nuna* = land, *qarfik* = place of
- 6 CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). *The World Factbook: Greenland*, 2017.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Klaus Georg Hansen, Søren Bitsch, and Lyudmila Zalkind, *Urbanization and the Role of Housing in the Present Development Process in the Arctic. Nordregion Report 2013:3* (Stockholm: Nordregio, 2013).
- 9 Sejersen, “Urbanization, Landscape Appropriation.”
- 10 Ibid., 167.
- 11 Hansen et al., *Urbanization and the Role of Housing*.
- 12 Sejersen, “Urbanization, Landscape Appropriation.”
- 13 Mark Nuttall, “Self-rule in Greenland — Towards the World’s First

- Independent Inuit State,” *Indigenous Affairs* 8, nos. 3–4 (2008): 64–70.
- 14 J.N. Larsen, “Climate Change, Natural Resource Dependency, and Supply Shocks: The Case of Greenland,” in *The Political Economy of Northern Regional Development*, ed. G. Winther (Copenhagen: Northern Council of Ministers, 2010), 205–18.
  - 15 Julia Christensen, Steven Arnjford, Sally Carraher, and Travis Hedwig, “Homelessness Across Alaska, the Canadian North and Greenland: A Review of the Literature on a Developing Social Phenomenon in the Circumpolar North,” *Arctic* 70, no. 4 (2017): 349–64.
  - 16 Homelessness in Greenland includes hidden and visible homelessness, ranging from couch surfing to sleeping rough. The latter often involves sleeping in the heated stairwells or utility rooms of apartment buildings. In this chapter, we consider the full spectrum of homelessness.
  - 17 Sejersen, “Urbanization, Landscape Appropriation.”
  - 18 J. Viemose, *Dansk kolonipolitik i Grønland* (København: Demos, 1977).
  - 19 Nils Ørvik, *Sikkerhetspolitikken, 1920–1939; fra forhistorien til 9. april 1940*, vol. 2 (JG Tanum, 1960), 68.
  - 20 Sejersen, “Urbanization, Landscape Appropriation”; Bo Wagner Sørensen, “Nuuk,” *Tidsskriftet Antropologi* 48 (2005).
  - 21 Sejersen, “Urbanization, Landscape Appropriation.”
  - 22 O. Marquardt, “Socio-økonomiske tilstande i Vestgrønland på Rinks tid: Befolknings-koncentration i kolonibyer og dannelse af loakle ‘Brædtmarkeder,’” *Grønlandsk kultur og samfundsforskning* 92 (1992): 147–82.
  - 23 Marianne Stenbaek, “Forty Years of Cultural Change among the Inuit in Alaska, Canada and Greenland: Some Reflections,” *Arctic* (1987): 300–09.
  - 24 *Ibid.*, 301.
  - 25 *Ibid.*
  - 26 These development schemes also included the controversial fødestedskriterie, which “made Greenlanders so angry that it



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- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Jes Barsøe Adolphsen and Tom Greiffenberg, *The Planned Development of Greenland 1950–1979* (Institut for Samfundsudviklingog-Planlægning, Aalborg Universitet, 1998).
- 29 Sejersen, “Urbanization, Landscape Appropriation,” 171.
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- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Deth Petersen, “The Impact of Public Planning on Ethnic Culture.”
- 35 Helge Kleivan, “Dominans og kontrol i moderniseringen af Grønland,” in *Grønlandifokus*, ed. Jan Hjarnø (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 1969), 141–66; Robert Paine, “The Path to Welfare Colonialism,” in *The White Arctic. Anthropological Essays on Tutelage and Ethnicity*, ed. Robert Paine (St. John’s: ISER Books, 1977), 7–28.
- 36 Susanne Dybbroe, “Is the Arctic Really Urbanising?” *Études/Inuit/Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008): 13–32.
- 37 Paine, “The Path to Welfare Colonialism”; Axel Kjaer Sørensen, *Danmark-Grønlandi det 20. Århundrede-en historisk oversigt* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1983).
- 38 Deth Petersen, “The Impact of Public Planning on Ethnic Culture.”
- 39 Ibid., 271.
- 40 Jens Dahl, “Greenland: Political Structure of Self-government,” *Arctic Anthropology* (1986): 315–24.

- 41 Jens, Dahl, *Saqqaq: An Inuit Hunting Community in the Modern World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).
- 42 Larsen, "Climate Change, Natural Resource Dependency, and Supply Shocks."
- 43 See K. Hendriksen, "Grønlands bygder: Økonomi og udviklingsdynamik" ["Greenland's settlements: Economy and development dynamics"] (PhD thesis, Aalborg Universitet and Danmarks Tekniske Universitet, 2013).
- 44 Alexander M. Ervin, "Conflicting Styles of Life in a Northern Canadian Town," *Arctic* (1969): 90–105.
- 45 Paine, "The Path to Welfare Colonialism."
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 William Tyler, "Postmodernity and the Aboriginal Condition: The Cultural Dilemmas of Contemporary Policy," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 3 (1993): 322–42.
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- 52 Gorm Winther, ed., *The Political Economy of Northern Regional Development*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2010).
- 53 See Dahl, "Identity, Urbanization and Political Demography"; Anthony J. Dzik, "Settlement Closure or Persistence: A Comparison of Kangeq and Kapisillit, Greenland," *Journal of Settlements and Spatial Planning* 7, no. 2 (2016): 99; Sejersen, "Urbanization, Landscape Appropriation."
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- 59 See Hendriksen, “Grønlands bygder.”
- 60 Hansen and Andersen, *Hjemløshed i Grønland.*; Hendriksen, “Grønlands bygder”; Rasmus Ole Rasmussen, *Mobilitet i Grønland: Sammenfatning af hovedpunkter fra analysen af mobiliteten i Grønland [Mobility in Greenland: Summary of main points from an analysis of mobility in Greenland]* (Nuuk, Greenland: Mobilitetsstyregruppen, 2010).
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- 64 Rasmus Ole Rasmussen, “Why the Other Half Leave: Gender Aspects of Northern Sparsely Populated Areas,” in *Demography at the Edge: Remote Human Populations in Developed Nations*, eds. D. Carson, R.O. Rasmussen, P. Ensign, L. Huskey, and A. Taylor (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 237–54.
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- 66 Rasmussen, *Mobilitet i Grønland*; Hansen and Andersen, *Hjemløshed i Grønland*.

- 67 Hansen and Andersen, *Hjemløshed i Grønland*.
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5: Resettlement, Urbanization, and Rural–Urban Homelessness Geographies

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