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The Limits of Social Capital: An Examination of Immigrants' Housing Challenges in Calgary

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A common explanation of immigrants' under-representation among the homeless population in Canada is that kinship and community networks act as a buffer to absolute homelessness. There are indications that immigrant homelessness is, however, increasing, suggesting that the buffering capacity of social networks reaches a limit. Further, evidence of precarious housing situations indicates that we should approach this form of housing provision with some caution. This paper draws on a larger study of housing difficulties among immigrants in Calgary to address the ways in which social capital serves a buffering role, and under what conditions it loses its ability to prevent absolute homelessness.

Key words: *immigration, social capital, housing, homelessness*

Immigration has a far-reaching impact on Canada's population and economic growth, particularly in large urban centers (Chui, Tran, & Maheux, 2007; Pruegger, Cook, & Richter-Salomons, 2008). Despite the crucial role of immigration in the future of Canadian cities, our management of immigrant integration has deteriorated in recent years. Immigrants' declining economic outcomes are well recognized, but comparable problems in the area of housing are much less studied and understood, despite their importance. In this article, we suggest that unwarranted optimism about social capital as a

mechanism to facilitate the housing of immigrants is an important part of this neglect. By drawing on the results of a multi-method study of newcomers' housing stress in Calgary, this paper will explore the role of social capital in mitigating and exacerbating housing challenges for immigrants to Canada. The analysis draws on findings from a two-stage multi-methods study, including a quantitative survey (292 participants) and in-depth interviews with twenty newcomers.

The under-representation of immigrants among the homeless population has been thought to result from the ways in which social networks and ethnocultural communities "buffer" vulnerability, providing affordable housing solutions through social capital. Such benign neglect, we argue, is inadequate. Firstly, with the declining economic situation of the growing immigrant population in Canada, buffering mechanisms show signs of reaching their limits. Secondly, our survey and interview results indicate that social capital is less important to housing access than is often assumed. Thirdly, we found that there are serious negative consequences when relying on social capital for housing access. Social capital tends to be romanticized in the academic and policy literature, with its "dark side" often neglected. When low-income immigrants have no alternative but to rely on their social networks for access to housing, this can lead to unfortunate situations of exploitation and abuse.

Assumptions about social capital must be critically examined in light of neoliberal discourses which have incorporated it in policy initiatives that shift responsibility for social issues onto individuals and communities. Our findings point to a need for seriously considering the discourse of social capital and notions of individuals and communities "helping themselves" in light of neoliberal ideologies—those that buttress the downloading of government responsibility for social issues onto citizens. While helpful as a broad conceptual tool for understanding the role of social relations as resources, this article makes a contribution to the study of social capital by proposing and demonstrating how it can be examined within the context of the concrete political economy (Smart, 2008). In this manner, the social capital lens can become significantly more useful in understanding contemporary society, by

shedding light on connections, networks, and solidarity as well as revealing disjunctures in light of global processes.

Social Capital as Theory and Policy Intervention

Social capital is a concept that emphasizes the resources that are embedded in social relationships, particularly reciprocity, obligation, and trust (Woolcock, 1998). Social capital is often understood from the dimension of networks between individuals and groups, as well as their engagement in participative communities (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Paxton, 2002). Most research on social capital focuses on its benefits to communities or individuals (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1998; Putnam, 1993). The concept emphasizes the ways in which relationships can be used to generate benefits of a material, social, or psychological nature. It varies from economic capital since obligations are not contractually enforceable and thus relies on culturally and contextually specific values and etiquette (Smart, 1993).

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 248). Social capital is context-dependent and takes many different interrelated forms, including obligations, trust, norms, and sanctions. For Bourdieu, social capital is used to increase the ability of an actor to advance her/his interests and becomes a resource in struggles carried out in different social arenas. He notes that social capital is fundamentally rooted in economic capital, though it can never be completely reduced to an economic form; social capital remains effective because it conceals its relationship to economic capital (see Bourdieu, 1986, 1998).

Robert Putnam's (1993) central thesis is that well-functioning economic systems and high levels of political integration are the result of the successful accumulation of social capital. In his view, Western societies are experiencing a decline of social capital, which explains poor voter turnout, increasing distrust of government, and poor participation in civil society, especially community voluntary associations. The family and the neighborhood have also lost their traditional strength as

key mechanisms for reinforcing solidarity and democracy. By strengthening the role of community-based voluntary organizations that negotiate, represent, and promote members' shared interests, social capital can be increased.

Social capital has been credited with the ability to cure most social ills (Portes, 1998). It helps people resolve collective problems with more ease, facilitates development, heightens awareness of our globally interconnected fates, fosters the flow of useful information, and improves people's health, resilience, and productivity (Policy Research Initiative, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Public health, crime, homelessness, alienation, immigrant integration, poverty, and underdevelopment are just some of the societal challenges that "can allegedly be resolved or alleviated through the appropriate mobilization of social capital" (Smart, 2008, p. 1). Despite the fanfare, some have pointed out that not all social capital is "good," and can lead to less than desirable outcomes. Too much social capital, for example, can result in closed ethnic communities where tight bonds become barriers to integration into the mainstream (Portes, 1998).

Given its relevance to conceptualizing social issues and their resolution, social capital theory is of particular interest to policy makers. For example, the World Bank has embraced social capital as a means to move beyond the "Washington Consensus" of global deregulation and promotion of the free market (Fine, 1999, 2006; Harris, 2001; Li, 2006). Dominant public discourses on social capital are based on the idea that strong participation in social networks, community organizations, and a sense of trust and solidarity facilitate cooperation between citizens. In turn, this reduces poverty and crime, whilst increasing political participation to allow for a better government (Helly, 2003).

Ideas about social capital, cohesion, and inclusion have also influenced Canadian public policy approaches, particularly since the 1990s. The Government of Canada Policy Research Initiative of the Privy Council Office conducted a major research program between 2003 and 2005 on social capital to understand how it can potentially impact public policy outcomes. The initiative also aimed to "develop a conceptual framework and measurement tools that will have practical applications

for various federal policy departments" and "transfer lessons learned and policy recommendations to key players in the policy and research communities (Policy Research Initiative, 2005, p. 2). One of the initiative's conclusions was that:

> Governments inevitably affect patterns of social capital development. Taking into consideration the role of social capital (and the interaction between social relationships and policies) in a more systematic way ... can potentially make a significant difference in the achievement of policy objectives. (p. 2)

Social Capital, Immigration and Housing

Theories of social capital have been particularly influential in policy responses to immigration and integration in receiving societies. Social capital is looked upon by researchers and policy makers to explain, among other issues, immigrant attachment to the labor market, economic mobility (Hernandez-Leon & Zuniga, 2002), educational attainment (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009), migration flows (Nannestad, Svendsen, & Svendsen, 2008), social cohesion and acculturation (Cheong, Edwards, Goulbourne, & Solomos, 2007; Hooghe, 2007), civic engagement and participation (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2009).

Although the struggle for adequate housing is a well-known experience of migrants throughout various historical periods, it is notable that immigrant housing outcomes in Canada have been deteriorating for the past twenty years. Studies have demonstrated that since the 1980s, immigrants' rate of homeownership has decreased dramatically; prior to this, immigrants' high levels of homeownership prompted the researchers to examine why they had more successful housing careers than Canadian-born persons (Haan, 2005). Presumptions of high levels of social capital among immigrant communities have been used to explain these changes in housing outcomes, particularly homeownership attainment, housing affordability, and access issues (Haan, 2005; Hulchanski, 1994; Murdie, 2002, 2003; Murdie & Teixeira, 1997; Ornstein, 2002; Owusu, 1998). For example, Kilbride and Webber (2006) explain decreasing housing outcomes from immigrants to Canada to be the result of a loss of social capital resulting from migration.

Other research suggests that social capital can play a positive role in housing outcomes as ethnocultural networks, informal assistance, and group pooling of resources somewhat buffer the extent of relative and absolute homelessness among immigrants (Chan, Hiebert, D'Addario, & Sherrell, 2005; Mendez, Hiebert, & Wyly, 2006; Pruegger & Tanasescu, 2007).

Understandings of social capital have impacted government responses and interventions in immigrant housing issues. Canadian Immigration and Citizenship, the ministry responsible for immigration and settlement, does not currently prioritize immigrants' housing outcomes as part of its mandate. The prevailing assumption is that immigrants find their way to housing via social capital, kin, and informal networks. In other words, immigrants "take care of their own" (Hiebert, D'Addario, & Sherrell, 2009, p. 4). The fact that immigrants are under-represented in the homeless population reaffirms the assumption that social capital is buffering housing difficulties. This assumption is being challenged by growing evidence of increasing housing challenges experienced by immigrants. Based on new data from the 2006 Canadian census, several trends can be observed. Immigrants are more likely than Canadian-born persons to spend 30% or more of their income on shelter, irrespective of their tenure. Further, the proportion of those overspending on housing is increasing: 28.5% of immigrants lived in households that spent 30% or more of their income on shelter in 2006, up from 25.4% in 2001. This compares with 18.6% of the Canadian-born population, which changed very little from 2001 (Rea, Mackey, & LeVasseur, 2008).

These Canadian trends are reconfirmed by The City of Calgary analysis of Census 2006 data for immigrant-led households, which showed that 42% of immigrant-led renter households and 24% of immigrant-led owner households were in need of affordable housing. By comparison, the Calgary general population showed a need of 37% and 12% for renters and owners respectively (City of Calgary, 2008a). Earlier findings from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, which captures data from arrivals between October 2000 and September 2001, showed that 32.2% of Calgary immigrants surveyed reported having difficulties finding suitable housing (Chui, 2003). Canada's 2001 census data also showed that recent

immigrants to Calgary were more likely to live with relatives, in larger and extended families, and with more children and seniors than their Canadian-born counterparts (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005). The proportion of very recent immigrants in extended family situations (one in eight) is twice as large as that of Canadian-born persons. In addition, crowding is a factor, with 15% of recent immigrant households in Calgary compared to 2% of non-immigrant households and 3% for earlier immigrants having one or more persons per room (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005). This data confirmed assumptions about the tendency and preference of immigrants to mobilize social capital in the form of kin, friend, and community networks to access housing.

The Role of Kin, Friends, and Ethnocultural Communities in Immigrant Housing: Results from the Quantitative Survey

What do increasing housing challenges facing immigrants tell us about the role of social capital in mitigating its effects? Can we explain the rise in housing pressures as a result of the changing role that social capital plays in buffering housing challenges? To shed light on these questions, we drew on recent results from a study that examined the experiences of immigrants' housing challenges in Calgary (Tanasescu et al., 2009).

Housing affordability is a critical issue throughout Canada, where more than 1.4 million households, roughly one in ten, are considered to be overspending on shelter (Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, 2008). Homelessness has grown to an estimated 150,000-300,000 persons nationally (Laird, 2007). These trends are mirrored in Calgary's case as well. The City of Calgary estimated that 37% of all Calgary renter households and 12% of all owner households were in need of affordable housing (City of Calgary, 2008b). In July 2008, Calgary's homeless count indicated an 18% increase from the number in 2006, bringing the total to 4,060 (City of Calgary 2008c).

These trends are a result of a number of factors. Calgary is Canada's fastest growing large city, with a population reaching one million in 2008 (City of Calgary, 2008a). Calgary's

economic and demographic growth has been intimately tied to the Alberta oil and gas industry's booms and busts over the past century. The unprecedented jump in oil prices during the mid-2000s fuelled economic growth, resulting in severe labor shortages until the onset of the global economic recession (City of Calgary, 2008d). The economic growth only translated into marginal increases in real wages, and the gap between the top and bottom income quintiles widened. The economic prospects that attracted migrants to Calgary placed upward pressure on rents and home prices. From 2005 to 2006, the average price of resale homes increased by almost 40% (Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, 2007). As a result of virtually no new rental construction, stock loss due to condo conversion, and increasing demand, rents continued to increase (Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, 2008). Calgary is currently experiencing increasing vacancy rates due to loss in employment growth that slowed migration. Despite the slowdown, rental rates have maintained high prices (Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, 2009).

Survey Methods

We analyzed data collected in July–August of 2008 from a survey of, and interviews with, immigrants experiencing housing stress. The quantitative data came from 292 survey responses, of which 289 were available for analysis—three of the surveys were excluded because the participant did not provide formal consent to participate. This data was analyzed using SPSS software. This data is complemented by in-depth interviews with twenty immigrants who self-identified as experiencing housing difficulties. The breakdown of participant characteristics is available in the full study report (Tanasescu et al., 2009); therefore, only findings relevant to the argument in this article are outlined herein. (Note: percentages have been rounded for ease in readability and are based on n=289 unless otherwise stated.)

The survey participants primarily came from the following countries of origin: Cameroon, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, Egypt, India, Iran, Mexico, Nepal, Philippines, Romania, Vietnam, and the former Yugoslavia. The sampling method for this study was based on a quota of 300 surveys

collected by research assistants (RAs) belonging to ethnocultural communities. To recruit participants, the RAs were instructed to administer a target of 30 surveys each using a snow-balling technique. The RAs were also instructed to use their personal connections to identify and invite participation from their networks, thus survey respondent selection was based on convenience and self-identification of participants as experiencing housing stress. Housing stress was purposefully broadly defined as having inadequate income to cover housing costs and/or housing that was perceived to be inadequate or unsafe in order to capture a range of self-perceived ideas around housing stress. Each interviewee represented their household; thus, they reported on the situation of their household members as well as their own. This method was chosen largely because the study aimed to gather quantitative data suitable for descriptive purposes complementary to in-depth interviews rather than for hypothesis testing. The survey instrument used included 60 questions regarding demographic information, housing status, household composition, housing condition, neighborhood preference, housing help, assistance access, citizenship, immigration and migration history, social history, employment, and income. Participants were provided with an opportunity to provide comments as well. The survey response rate was 79%. Ethics clearance was obtained from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) before data collection commenced.

Discussion of Survey Findings

The majority of participants (66%) were between 25 and 44 years old, 23% were between 45 and 64, and 9% were between 18 and 24. There was a fairly even gender breakdown with 51% male and 49% female respondents. Most of the respondents were Permanent Residents (65%) or Canadian Citizens (27%) at the time they participated in the survey. Most were employed (57%), 12% were unemployed but looking for work, and 9% were in school. Most (81%) arrived in Canada since 2000; participants had been in Canada for an average of six years at the time of data collection.

Most respondents (70%) were renters, while 24% were

homeowners. The average percentage of immediate family net income spent on housing was 50%; this places them at high risk for experiencing homelessness according to The City of Calgary (2008e). Approximately 34% reported their housing was in need of minor repairs and 9% reported housing was in need of major repairs. Respondents reported experiencing difficulties with housing for multiple reasons. Among these were: having a low income (33%); not having a job (21%); language barriers (24%); age of children (20%); lack of references (18%) and identification documents (17%); the size of their family (16%); their ethnicity/race (13%); and a lack of credit history or bad credit (13%).

The study gathered data to test particular assumptions about the nature of housing challenges in immigrant populations and the strategies employed to mitigate these, particularly those related to social capital. The common assumptions in the research and policy literature are that immigrants are likely to rely on housing help (finding, obtaining, maintaining housing) from: (a) immediate and extended kin; and (b) cultural and religious community networks. Therefore, immigrants will likely prefer living near other ethnocultural community members and facilities. The findings from the survey and the subsequent in-depth interviews with immigrants experiencing housing difficulties revealed surprising findings that shed further light on these assumptions.

In particular, the hypothesis that kin played a critical role in housing assistance was challenged by survey results. For example, when asked about co-habitation with self-identified immediate family, most respondents reported living with their spouse (60%) and children (58%). About 4% lived with parents, 3% lived with siblings and 2% lived with in-laws; these were classified by respondents as immediate family members. Only 3% of respondents reported co-habitation with other family members, including in-laws, cousins, step-children, uncles, and aunts. When asked about house-sharing arrangements, the frequency of sharing with people not considered as immediate family was about 44%. These findings challenge the assumption that extended kin relations play a central role in easing housing challenges for immigrants. The instrument did not have an item measuring if respondents had kin networks

in the city; this would have influenced the outcome.

The survey findings also show that housing help mostly came from friends rather than family, ethnocultural communities, or settlement agencies. When asked about where they received help finding housing, participants' most common response was "from friends" (60%), followed by several indicators that point to relying on one's own capacities (34% internet, 20% newspaper, 15% fliers/postings). A smaller percentage reported receiving help from family (14%), settlement (13%) and homeless serving agencies (8%).

Another central assumption about immigrants is that they rely on their ethnocultural communities, religious or cultural associations (both formal and informal) to assist with housing. This is often how the tendency of immigrant groups moving to a particular city or neighborhood is explained. They need to have ready access to the informal networks that can assist in settlement with jobs, housing, information, religious activities, and social inclusion. However, only a small portion of survey respondents reported receiving any help with house finding from their faith (4%) or their ethnocultural community (5%). The survey further suggests that living close to faith and ethnocultural communities is less important to immigrants than expected. Only 10% and 7% reported being close to their ethnocultural and faith communities, respectively, as something they liked about where they live. Rather, respondents preferred having access to transit, shopping, and schools in nice and safe neighborhoods. Their neighborhood dislikes primarily concerned lack of housing affordability and being far from work. In fact, only 4% and 6% reported being far from their faith and ethnocultural community, respectively, as something they did not like about where they lived.

These findings suggest that dominant understandings of social capital as a buffer to immigrants' housing difficulties should be re-examined. House sharing with non-immediate family members and high reliance on friends for house sharing counters the assumption that immigrants activate kin networks to ease settlement related stress. The minimal role of the faith and ethnocultural community in housing assistance reported further challenges assumptions about their importance in informal housing assistance.

The Contested Role of Informal Assistance,
Social Networks, and Ethnocultural Communities:
Results from the In-Depth Interviews

Survey findings nevertheless confirm that relationships
play an important role in housing assistance, but support tends
to come from one's immediate family members and friends.
What do these findings tell us about social capital's role in im-
migrant housing? To shed light on informal housing assistance
from family and friends, the remainder of this section will
examine the perspectives of twenty newcomers who agreed to
participate in in-depth interviews.

In-Depth Interview Methods
The participants were recruited using the same research as-
sistants deployed for the quantitative survey administration.
All RAs were asked to invite potential interviewees for the re-
search team members to talk to at a later time. In addition, two
agencies serving newcomers also assisted with recruitment of
three of the interviewees. The selection criteria were the same
as that for the survey—newcomers who self-identified as ex-
periencing housing stress and were willing to undertake the
interview. There was no quota or specific selection criteria re-
garding family type, age, or country of origin. As the RAs and
agencies suggested potential interviewees, the researchers took
care to ensure there was a variety of countries of origin rep-
resented and to ensure adequate gender representation. The
immigrant interviewees selected were comprised of thirteen
females and eight males, most of whom were between 30-40
years old. Nine were married with children, one was married
without children, five were single parents, and two were single
without children. In all but one case, each interviewee repre-
sented their household. Respondents' countries of origin were:
China, Columbia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Lebanon, Mexico,
Morocco, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Vietnam.
Participants were interviewed by three Master of Arts
level researchers on the project team using a semi-structured
interview schedule that focused on their housing situation,
immigration experience, support networks, barriers to stable
housing, and solutions. All but four of the interviews included

the presence of the referring RA or agency worker to assist with interpretation. Interviews were audio-taped and notes were taken from the recording by the interviewer, who subsequently analyzed these thematically following a pre-set thematic guide developed by the research team. To ensure consistency between the three interviewers, meetings were held monthly to review themes from the interviews being conducted and update the interview guide. At the end of the data collection, one researcher undertook the thematic analysis, and the other two subsequently verified the findings.

Discussion of Interview Findings

Interviewees spoke about a common housing trajectory in which informal relations played a critical role. When looking to relocate either from abroad or elsewhere in Canada, immigrants contact a friend, family member, or acquaintance before immigrating. This contact often provides them with valuable information about job opportunities and potential housing options. The "guide" would at times connect the immigrant to a potential housing provider. At other times, though not as often, the guide would offer to host the immigrant for the initial resettlement period. A friend or family member sometimes acts as a "host" to the immigrant and his or her family until they are settled with employment and can obtain housing on their own. The immigrant is a "guest" and lives in a house-sharing situation for varying periods of time, depending on their capacity to find their own home and how well co-habitation ensues. Generally, the guest family has access to a limited portion of the host's home. In one case, a family of four only had one room in which to live. Because the host may also be struggling with high housing costs, there is an expectation that the guest will contribute to household expenses. Therefore, the host-guest relationship has an aspect of exchange, which can take the form of payment for rent, or reciprocity, such as baby-sitting or cleaning for the host. As one interviewee noted, the two families "are helping each other" (Interviewee 15).

The host-guest relationship between friends and acquaintances usually led to the guest family improving its housing by moving out of an inadequate, shared space and into their own housing. The parting of ways between the host and guest

was described as often amicable and tensions were smoothed by the understanding that the house sharing arrangement was temporary and undertaken 'by choice' and mutual benefit for both parties. Despite the important role of informal housing help, the host-guest relationship is by no means without strains. In fact, participants described having problems with their host in six interviews. For example, one immigrant noted he was "more stressed about finding housing than finding a job" because he felt he was burdening the host family. Many pointed to the lack of privacy that shared space resulted in for both host and guests. In some cases, the relationship broke down because of the strain of a lack of privacy, and the guest family was so uncomfortable that they had to leave. In other cases, there is a realization that the host-guest relationship or any settlement help from co-ethnic friends and acquaintances is not "free." As one interviewee noted, his friends connected him with their acquaintances only for him to realize that these connections were "expensive." He remarked that "when you really need help from friends, there are no friends; I stay away from my people" (Interviewee 4).

It is important to note that when the host-guest relationship involves members of the same family, it can have different dynamics than when it is between friends and acquaintances. Five interviewees reported difficulties with family members with respect to housing. When these immigrants planned to come to Canada, they did so with the intention of joining a close family member (e.g., sister, uncle, and husband) and arranged to live with them. However, when these relationships broke down, considerable difficulties ensued for both hosts and guest, which we will describe further in this section. It is important to note that these five cases involved females who were either married and reuniting with their spouses or single and joining their families.

The in-depth interviews demonstrate another side to the romanticized view of ethnocultural communities, particularly from women who are more vulnerable to victimization and marginalization. Being single, female, and new to Canada made these women particularly vulnerable. The situation was further complicated for those who had children with them. One interviewee spoke about being victimized by community

members and forced into illegal activities (Interviewee 10). In another situation, a woman who came to Canada to live with her sister reported that she was asked to leave after refusing to be her sister's "slave" (Interviewee 12). In another case, a woman joined her husband and his family in Canada and was forced into unpaid labor. She was physically abused and confined until she ran away. She sought help from an uncle in Canada, who, in turn, subjected her to similar treatment (Interviewee 13). Those who spoke about their experiences of 'getting out' noted they were exceptions.

It is therefore important to recognize that family and community assistance and close bonds can be extremely helpful in settlement but can also be abusive and exploitative. One female participant noted that she does not go near neighborhoods with higher concentration of co-ethnics for fear of being recognized and reported to her husband and uncle's families (Interviewee 13). After having experienced these situations, some participants note that they purposely sought outside help from members outside of their ethnocultural communities.

Contextualizing Increasing Immigrant Housing Difficulties

Clearly, social capital is not the panacea to immigrants' housing challenges. The absence of a concerted government response to increasing immigrants' housing difficulties, even when manifested as homelessness, is based on the assumption that ethnocultural communities "take care of their own" and that "they know best." The intensifying housing challenges immigrants are experiencing, as confirmed by the study's findings, must be understood in light of larger macro-social processes including: (a) the growing reliance of Canadian cities on immigration for economic growth; (b) increasing disparities in labor market outcomes for immigrants correlated to language, country of origin and visible minority status; and (c) the complex interplay of immigrant settlement in major urban centers where competitive housing markets and systemic barriers to housing exist. These trends are also apparent, based on immigrants' experiences, with housing in Calgary.

Calgary's foreign-born population has grown rapidly to

become the fifth-highest in the country. In 2005, almost one-quarter (23.6%) of the city's population was foreign-born (Chui et al., 2007). From 2001 to 2006, the foreign-born population grew by 28% compared with 9.1% for the Canadian-born population. Despite the importance of immigrants for Calgary's economic growth, they are experiencing intensifying difficulties finding and maintaining appropriate employment and housing. The gap between the immigrant employment rate and that of non-immigrants widened and immigrant unemployment rates remain higher than those of non-immigrants; the lack of recognition of foreign credentials remains a key barrier to employment for recent immigrants (City of Calgary, 2008c). Census data demonstrates that over the past quarter century, the earnings gap between recent immigrant workers and Canadian-born workers widened significantly (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2008). At the same time, the proportion of immigrants with a university degree in jobs with low educational requirements (such as clerks, cashiers, and taxi drivers) increased during the 1991 to 2006 period. Galarneau and Morissette (2008) conclude that the observed difference between the labor market outcomes of native-born Canadians and immigrants can be attributed to immigrants' language, country of origin, and visible minority status.

The employment and income disparities immigrants face in Canada, and Calgary specifically, are congruent with larger global economic trends. The economic restructuring that resulted from a shift towards globalized capitalism in the past two decades has coincided with a significant change in Canada's immigration policy—a shift towards developing countries being sources of immigrants—and retrenchment of the welfare state from social assistance and social housing. It is important to note that immigrants to cities embedded in the global economy do not have the same opportunities upon arrival; the segmentation of visible minority foreign-born workers into low wage employment is a global phenomenon in developed nations' cities (Friedmann, 1986; Friedmann & Wolff, 1982; King, 1991; Sassen, 2002), and apparent in Calgary's case as well. Calgary's central role in the oil and gas industry has enabled its rise to prominence on the world stage and simultaneously necessitated increased attraction of flexible workers to fuel

economic growth. Both highly skilled technical and low-skilled workers are needed to meet the labor need of the globalized city, and Calgary has been no exception. Canada's immigration policy places significant value on higher education for immigrants; however, actual labor needs in receiving urban centers include demands in the low wage, low skill sector. Trends in employment for immigrants by industry show a significant growth in immigrant employment in the lower wage sales and service occupations (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Growing income and employment disparities impact immigrants' capacity to obtain and maintain housing. The fact that immigrants are attracted to major urban centers, where real estate and rental prices are the highest, further limits their capacity to obtain affordable housing. Not surprisingly, housing affordability challenges, low wages, and systemic barriers to housing combine to impact immigrants' housing situations. The housing challenges faced by immigrants in Calgary echo increasing reports of relative and absolute homelessness reported in Vancouver (Chan et al., 2005), Toronto (Murdie, 2003, 2005; Paradis, Novac, Sarty, & Hulchanski, 2008), and Edmonton (Enns, Felix, & Gurnett, 2007).

There is evidence that immigrant housing outcomes have been deteriorating for the past twenty years. Studies have demonstrated that since the 1980s, immigrants' rate of homeownership has decreased dramatically (Haan, 2005). Researchers have attributed the erosion of this "homeownership advantage" (Ray & Moore, 1991) to discrimination and systemic barriers to housing and employment (Anucha, 2006; Ornstein, 2002; Owusu, 1998). Research further confirms that immigrants, especially visible minority immigrants, are streamed into poorer neighborhoods with marginal housing stock that significantly affects the life chances of their residents (Fiedler, Schuurman, & Hynd, 2006; Smith & Ley, 2008). There is a growing relationship between the clustering of certain visible minority groups in urban neighborhoods and the spatial concentration of poverty in Canadian cities (Walks & Bourne, 2006). Immigration status interacts and interweaves with other interlocking oppressions of ethnicity, race, gender, religion, age and language to impact housing (Dion, 2001; Ornstein, 2002; Paradis et al., 2008; Pruegger & Tanasescu, 2007; Skaburksis,

2004). Discrimination by real estate agents, mortgage lenders, insurers, and landlords make it difficult for immigrants and racial minorities to obtain housing (Chan et al., 2005; Danso & Grant, 2000; Haan, 2007; Murdie, 2005; Skaburskis, 1996; Wayland, 2007).

These trends are confirmed by results of the Calgary study. Not surprisingly, the most common barriers to housing that were reported centered on inadequate income. The issue of foreign credentials was persistently mentioned as a reason for housing difficulties, because it essentially excluded the immigrant from the higher-skilled work and wages that would enable him/her to afford appropriate housing. The additional barriers to housing reported (language, the age of children, lack of appropriate documentation, race and ethnicity, and poor or no credit history) compounded with inadequate income to limit access to mainstream housing. As a result of these barriers, immigrants had to rely on several different strategies to obtain housing. House sharing and poorer quality accommodation were two common ways immigrants managed to gain access to housing they could afford. However, inappropriate or inadequate housing, such as basement suites or room rentals, is more likely to be insecure, unsafe, and have considerable health consequences. The lack of knowledge about landlord-tenant rights and the fear of losing housing increased the vulnerability of immigrants. These precarious housing situations resulted in immigrants worrying significantly about their living situation.

Although many were clearly in need of support, most survey respondents did not report accessing mainstream systems. Housing help came primarily from friends rather than social agencies, government, or ethnocultural and religious community associations. As discussed, these informal networks and accompanying housing arrangements have both benefits and notable strains. The lack of access of agencies and mainstream support systems was at times reinforced by interviewees' feelings of shame and guilt about "failing" to succeed in Canada. However, there were significant barriers to accessing these systems as well. Immigrants commonly reported not knowing assistance was available or how to access it. Those who tried to gain social housing, daycare, and/or social

assistance supports met significant challenges navigating complex application processes, and some simply gave up. Immigrants also expressed a lack of clarity around why they were denied a particular benefit. In cases where benefits were obtained, these were often inadequate to meet the basic necessities of living in Calgary.

Conclusion

The experiences of study participants illustrate the impacts of neoliberal policy trends in state approaches to social welfare that reinforce the importance of individual enterprise as a means of mitigating the failure of the market and government to provide affordable housing and support social integration. These processes are contextualized in the broader economic restructuring that resulted from the shift toward globalized capitalism in the past two decades (Hackworth & Moriah, 2006; Harvey, 1989, 2005, 2007; Lyon-Callo, 2004), which has resulted in "an attenuation of capitalist and class interests" and "growing coincidence of capitalist interests across borders" (Harrison, 2005, p. 3). The impacts of neoliberal ideologies in practice have led to the "intensification of inequities across classes, genders, and ethnicities, both within and between developed and underdeveloped worlds" (Harrison, 2005, p. 5). These inequities are manifested by the housing difficulties facing immigrants captured in this study.

Given the widespread and complex global processes that have created the current housing and income disparities for immigrants, the expectation that ethnocultural communities and informal assistance between friends and family members will buffer these impacts seems overly optimistic. Even if immigrants could be absorbed by family, friends, and community members, there are clear tensions and pressures that arise from these situations. The declining economic prospects of immigrants further reduce this sustaining capacity and the desirability of reliance on this mechanism as a buffer to homelessness. Though informal housing assistance can help with the payment of increasing shelter costs and assist in the settlement process, we must keep in mind the costs of such savings.

Although Calgary and Canada rely on immigration to fill

labor needs and remain competitive in the global economy, government action to address the basic needs of immigrants arriving in over-heated housing markets has been limited and has therefore contributed to current challenges. The barriers immigrants face to accessing mainstream supports are symptomatic of the neoliberal state's retreat from social assistance in the past twenty years. For immigrants, furthermore, access challenges are compounded by racism and discrimination. In a sense, the discourse of social capital and individuals as well as communities "helping themselves" resounds neoliberal discourse that legitimizes the downloading of government responsibility for social issues onto citizens. While helpful as a broad conceptual tool for understanding the role of social relations as resources, social capital should be examined within the context of the concrete political economy (Smart, 2008). The social capital lens can become significantly more useful in understanding in contemporary society if it is used to complement the concern with ties, relationships, and solidarity with attention to disjuncture and tension.

These findings have implications for policy and programming. The housing cost challenges immigrants face are shared with other groups and confirm the need to increase the supply of affordable housing options that are appropriate for newcomers in terms of size, location, and proximity to amenities. The reported barriers to accessing mainstream supports point to the need for a thorough review of current policies and practices, as well as the removal of barriers for those most in need of receiving mainstream supports. Immigrants face the added challenges of being new to Canada and may lack the language skills necessary to navigate these systems. A central gap that this research points to is the fact that current settlement funding does not focus on housing as a critical component to successful transitions in the host country, and therefore adequate resources are not being targeted to this end.

There is also a clear need to enhance collaboration and communication between the homeless and settlement sectors to increase joint program design, planning, and service delivery for immigrants, given the apparent need in these communities. This raises issues around tailoring services to meet the needs of immigrants and ensuring their appropriateness and

accessibility. There is a need to increase immigrant awareness about housing supports, services, and rights. We have to be mindful that working with and through ethnocultural communities are not the sole strategies through which these reforms can be pursued.

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