

# Differing Relations to Tradition amongst Australian Indigenous Homeless People

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This essay explores a growing, visible form of Indigenous homelessness in contemporary Australia that can be termed “spiritual homelessness,” but which has not been adequately defined or understood using empirical evidence. Selected case studies provide a means of understanding the distinction between two categories of public-place-dwelling Aboriginal people: those who are reproducing their traditions in foreign places in a way that corresponds with the 2014 IASTE conference theme “Mobility and the Reimagination of Traditions”; and those who are unable to reconnect with their traditions and are spiritually bereft, corresponding with those who have no effective “Anchor to Their Traditions in Place,” another conference theme. It concludes by offering suggestions for further research and project implementation in the area of Indigenous behavior settings.

A growing, visible form of Indigenous homelessness in contemporary Australia is being termed “spiritual homelessness,” but is currently without adequate definition or understanding based on empirical evidence. In this article I argue that this concept divides mobile Aboriginal public-place dwellers who are absent from their homeland and living itinerant lifestyles in towns and cities into two categories: those who have lost their traditions (spiritually homeless) and are chronically homeless, and those who are maintaining their traditions in a new itinerant lifestyle through the re-creation of traditional place properties wherever they camp or reside.

The above analysis sets up a potential hypothesis about spiritual homelessness being a disconnect with homeland places and extended kin. To explore this hypothesis, the article draws from two case studies of Aboriginal persons removed from their parents at birth. These indicate how spiritual homelessness involves a disrupted and unfulfilled state of “relational” personhood with severe diminishment of connection to both kin and country.

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## ON BEING HOMED

To explore what spiritual homelessness might be among Aboriginal people, it is first necessary to consider what a traditional Aboriginal “home” is. Shelley Mallett has provided a useful review of the construct of “home.”<sup>1</sup> Although carried out in a Western context, it can still serve as a departure point for developing and comparing a cross-cultural working definition of what “home” means in the Aboriginal senses of the word (and indeed, for other Indigenous groups).

Unsurprisingly, Mallett did not produce a singularly useful theoretical position or leverage point for developing the theoretical construct of “home.” Rather, she emphasized the plurality, diversity, and contrasting interpretations of its properties and definitions. Fortunately, this fits with the premise that Aboriginal constructs of home might be different from Anglo-Australian ones. According to Mallett:

*Clearly the term home functions as a repository for complex, interrelated, and at times contradictory socio-cultural ideas about people’s relationship and one another, especially family, and with places, spaces, and things. It can be a dwelling place or a lived space of interaction between people, places, things; or perhaps both. Briefly, how home is and has been defined at any given time depends upon “specification of locus and extent” and the broader historical and social context.<sup>2</sup>*

This plurality is undoubtedly the case with Aboriginal people today, too. They occupy varying positions of intercultural practice in the different cities, settlements and regions of Australia, with the distinction frequently traceable to differential processes and experiences of cultural change during the colonial (from 1788) and postcolonial eras.

In addition to producing a useful guide to the multidisciplinary social science literature on “home,” Mallett pointed to the difficult semantic history of the term and the emergence of its modern Western meaning. Specifically, she noted the tendency for most authors to uncritically conflate “house” (the physical structure) and “home” (the polysemous concept). Maintaining this distinction is essential when tracking the etymology and historical shifts in the meanings of the word.

Mallett also freely acknowledged her incapacity to deal with the cross-cultural literature on home, and she drew instead largely on the Anglo-European and Anglo-American origins of the concept. This involved tracing a shift from the medieval home — the “*heim*,” “*ham*,” or “*heem*” in the Germanic, as village, estate or town (after John Hollander<sup>3</sup>) — through a seventeenth-century division of the concept into (a) the nationalistic concept of homeland, and (b) the site of domestic morality where familial property could be safeguarded (“the Englishman’s house is his castle”). This second concept would later evolve into the idea of “home as haven,” incorporating both “house and surrounding land.”

By the seventeenth century, European house design principles were already drawing on concepts of privacy, domesticity, intimacy and comfort. One thread of historical argument explains this as a consequence of industrialization. In the preindustrial era, household organization was predicated on sociability. But with the growing separation of workplace and living place as a result of industrialization, the home and haven became predicated on notions of privacy. The working class had been fully enculturated to this phenomenon by the mid-twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

For his part, Hollander traced the early derivation of the Germanic words for “home” from the Indo-European *kei*, meaning “lying down” and “something dear or beloved” — translated as “a place to lay one’s head.”<sup>5</sup> In contrast to more recent Western usage, which equates “home” and “house,” therefore, this would seem to suggest a safe place to sleep in beloved country; and this in turn might imply a camp in one’s homeland. To the current author, this clearly resonates with a traditional Aboriginal context.

Taken with the other concepts as set out above, the preindustrial concepts of “home” thus seem to emphasize a beloved place (village, estate or town) of sociability where one can safely sleep. Let me now discuss the significance of campsites in Aboriginal clan estates as a generator of the traditional Aboriginal construct of home or homeland.

## HOME AS A SET OF CAMPSITES IN LARDIL COUNTRY

During the 1970s I carried out an in-depth study of the traditional geography of the Lardil people of the North Wellesley Islands (FIGS. 1–5).<sup>6</sup> At the time of early European contact, the islands of this Aboriginal tribe were divided into some 29 estates, each under the custodianship of a patriclan, with each estate made up of many individual named places (see, for example, those identified in Figure 2).

Traditional Lardil places were all distinguished with individual names, but most were not articulated with structures. The older adults knew all of the place names throughout Lardil lands (and they probably exceeded a thousand in number) as well as important properties associated with each. Common properties further allowed aggregates of places to be classified into categories or special types. These included campsites, wells, “Story Places” (sacred sites), initiation grounds, special resource collecting places, etc. (see, for example, the places on the map of Langungatji in Figure 3).

Lardil elders could also explain the origin of most of the places in their countries. Generally, they had all been created during the travels of ancestral heroes and supernatural beings — e.g., Manhpil, Dewil Dewil, and Jin Jin, the creators of coastal landscapes. Thuwathu the Rainbow Serpent also added power to Story Places, which enabled increase rituals to be performed at them (i.e., ritual actions which were believed to cause a reproduction of the totemic animal, plant, or mete-

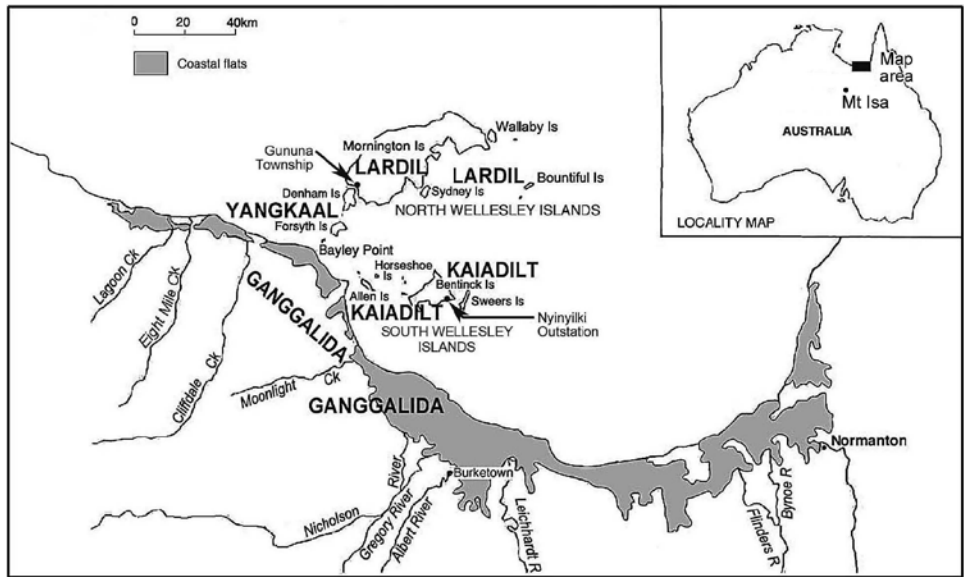


FIGURE 1. The Tangkic language groups of the Wellesley Island region.

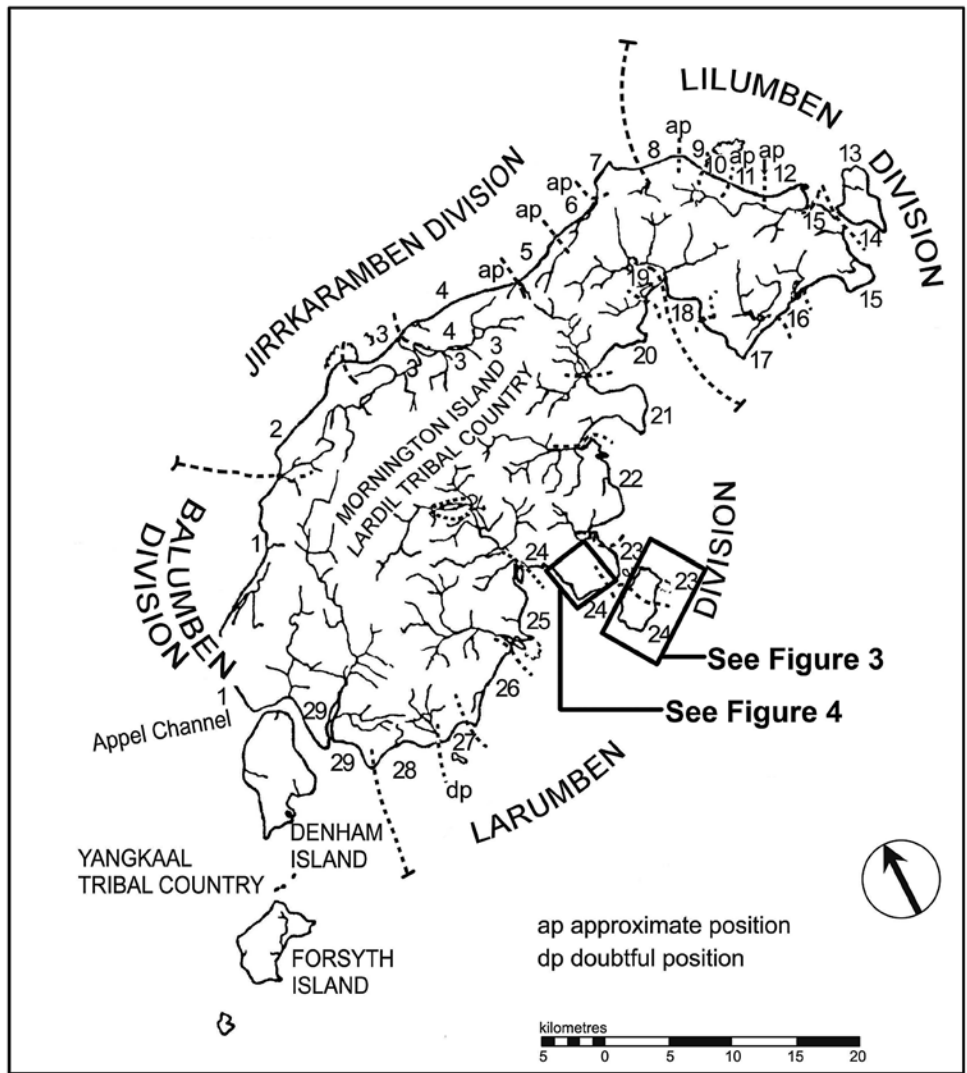


FIGURE 2. Lardil estates and geographic divisions, 1975.

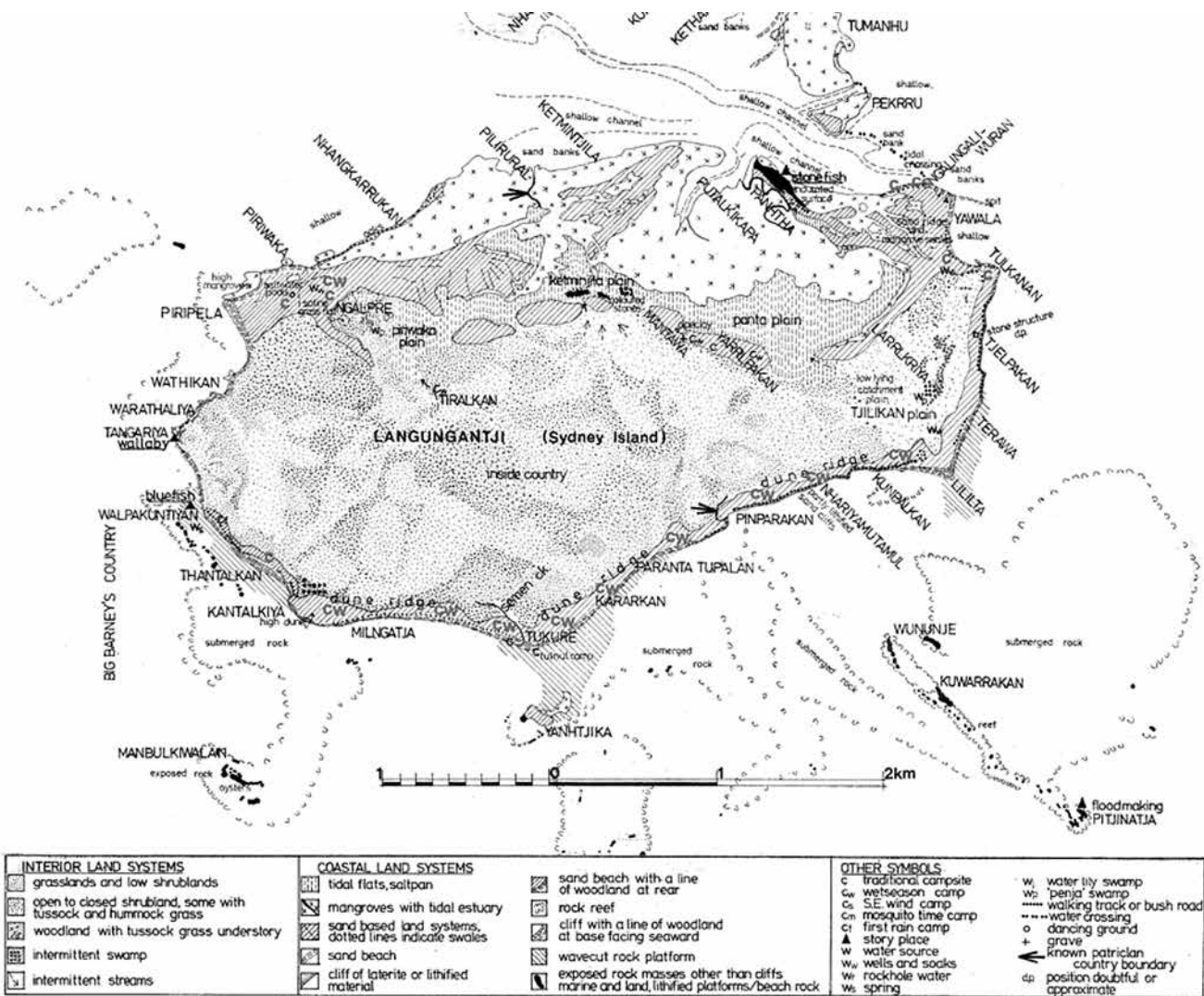


FIGURE 3. Ethno-geography of Langungantji (Sydney Island), Wellesley Islands, southern Gulf of Carpentaria.

orological phenomenon associated with it). These places were considered to be the fountainheads of life where particular species could be ritually activated to come forth and multiply.

DICK ROUGHSEY'S BIRTHPLACE

The case of Lardil author Dick Roughsey's birthplace is particularly instructive when it comes to relating these beliefs and cultural practices to the idea of being "homed." As he explained in his edited 1971 autobiography *Moon and Rainbow*:

*I was born under a clump of pandanus palms at Gara Gara, just behind Goobirah Point [Kupare]. It must have been somewhere around 1920, but I am not sure of my exact age. When I was about twelve my mother*

*showed me the place where I was born, and said it was at the time of the ripe pandanus nuts, which ripen in September. Naturally my birth name is also Gara Gara [Karrakarra].?*

Although Dick's Aboriginal name was Gubulathaldin (meaning "Rolling Sea"), he had a supplementary birthplace name, Karrakarra (FIG. 6). In his book, he described the Story Place on nearby Point and the related sacred history of the native bees who attempted to cross from there to Sydney Island before being chased back by the Stingray, Balibal. However, Dick's unedited manuscript contains a much lengthier and richer stream-of-consciousness-type reflection, and this account is more useful for understanding the salient properties of this popular campsite in his own cultural perception and how it contributes to a sense of home country.

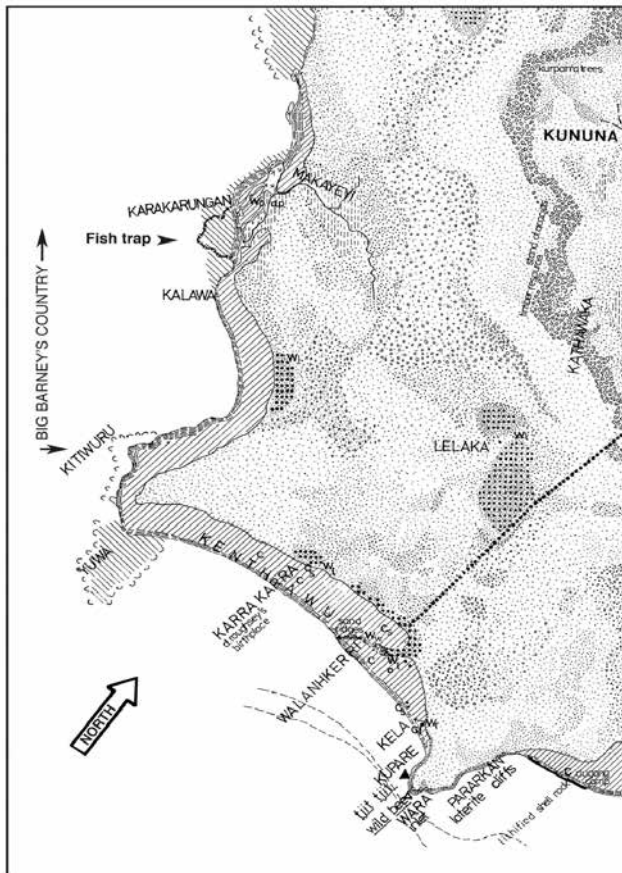


FIGURE 4. Map showing Kupare Point on Mornington Island with Dick Roughsey's birthplace, Karrakarra, nearby.



FIGURE 5. A group of Lardil men constructing a windbreak using the beach vine thaburru (*Cassythia filiformis*) for a nocturnal camp. The location is near Dick Roughsey's birthplace of Karrakarra. The men were traveling with the author on Mornington Island in 1974. The sacred site of Kupare Point is in the background.

When I was a boy of about 12 my mother showed me the place where I was born, it was a pretty place near a clump of pandanus, at the time of the falling of the ripe pandanus nut about September. The pandanus nuts when green it all stuck together, like and shape as pineapple when its getting ripe they turned red and when it falls on the ground, and lie there until its dry and browning then its gathered in with bush bark made like basket to carry any food stuff or baby in it. . . . [After cooking] they then will smack the burnt nut to pieces and careful take out [the kernel] nuts, that taste good. The nut is a small white one and it is milkie when we eat them, it even help mothers in those early days how to keep their breast up with milk for the baby's food.<sup>8</sup>

Here, Dick provided a description of one of the seasonal times this camp was utilized and the type of economic activity (pandanus nut harvest) which took place — due to the presence of a permanent freshwater well — in conjunction with fishing and dugong hunting. As Dick went on:

A birth place was always carefully chosen, plenty of shade from the sun, clean sand, and plenty of firewood to light big fire near mother to keep flies away. The mother was looked after by her sister, or if no sisters another woman of the tribe. My mother was looked after by grandmother Garrandu, wife a member of my father's tribe. And my father stayed away until my skin turned dark. . . . The mother is not allowed to walk over to her father's camp until one month.<sup>9</sup>

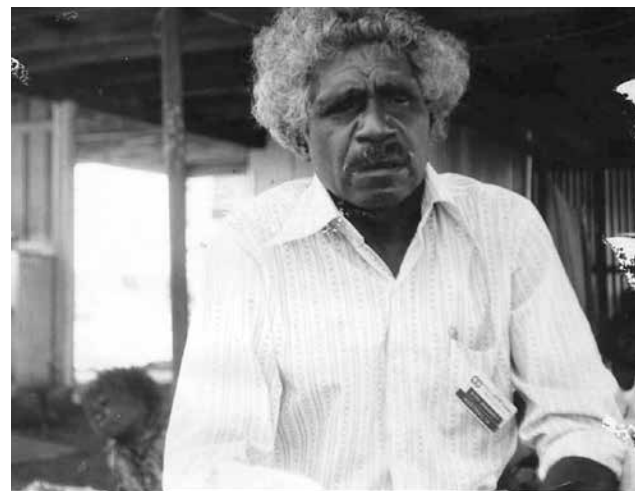


FIGURE 6. Gubalathaldin, or Dick Roughsey, c.1980, during one of his short visits to Mornington Island between his Cape York projects with Percy Trezise and his engagements as Chair of the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australian Council.

As this passage indicates, the economic capacity of the birthing camp locale was thus critical for the support of the mother and related midwives for an extended period. Dick described another important seasonal vegetable resource at this campsite.

*Garagara [Karrakarra] is a nice place. . . . Not far away it has a water lily swamp. This water lily is divided to so many people when the lillies are ripe and ready to dig and eat. People are sent as a messenger, to go and bring them all to come from different countries to come and share with the lilly. So then as they are all there. They all divided the part of the swamp to each tribe of people and then we all dig in the swamp and have a good time together.<sup>10</sup>*

Memories of the campsite were thus founded on predominantly seasonal occupation characteristics, as well as on special bio-social events such as birthing, feasting, and person-naming. Dick also described, for example, the large-scale tribal feasting that would follow the catch of multiple dugong.

My study of Lardil camps established that they were complex units of place. They could range from small camps occupied by one or several domiciliary groups for a few days, to larger camps occupied by three or four domiciliary groups, to even larger ones that could be occupied by several socio-geographic groups (twelve or so visiting clans) for up to six weeks when concentrated food supplies were available and the host group dispatched invitations. Such options for camping were decided within seasonal parameters. The availability of seasonal food harvests, together with the prevailing local climate, would influence the size and spatial structure of camps, the type of shelter created, hunter-gatherer methods, the use of certain artifacts, and other concerns such as diet, length of occupation, and movement patterns.

Each Lardil patriclan country contained multiple campsites. I mapped nine in the country of a key consultant, Fred Jaurth, and seventeen in the estate of another, Kelly Bunbujee. At any given time most Lardil campsites were unoccupied, and there were few physical structures or markers to indicate their function. Thus, architectural objects did not necessarily contribute to continuity of place properties. Rather, in the pre-mission era, Lardil places were defined by a permanency of behavioral properties over long periods of time. And because of a consistent pattern of usage, each camp would likely be associated for each adult with a set of previous experiences there. This might include a wealth of memories, daydreams, nostalgia, imagery of people and events, and revelations at sacred sites extending back in time through the many seasonal movement cycles. Individual shelters were too impermanent to be remembered in this way. "Home" was thus comprised of the campsites and other places in one's country, but not any particular architectural residence. This is an example of "home" being predicated on country and sociability rather than privacy.

Relationships between people, their homeland places, and the totemic species of their Story Places still share special cultural properties binding all three together. The Lardil cosmological explanation of these three sets of phenomena are interdependent, each providing a consistent set of beliefs for the others. A fourth interdependent domain is that of the Dreamtime universe. Links into this world can be found in the landscape imbuing everyday experience in one's country as profound, spiritual and personalized. Individual identity is based on an animal, plant, or other natural phenomenon, and with that being's "Story Place" (place of totemic residence and procreation). Thus cosmologic and religious thought permeates the nature of Lardil places.

This Aboriginal sense of country as home was shared by all other politically stable Aboriginal groups. The eminent mid-twentieth-century anthropologist W.F.H. Stanner commented further on the multivalent meaning of the classical Aboriginal construct of "home":

*No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland. Our word "home," warm and suggestive though it be, does not match the Aboriginal word that may mean "camp," "heart," "country," "everlasting home," "totem place," "life source," "spirit centre," and much else all in one. Our word "land" is too spare and meagre. . . . The Aboriginal would speak of "earth" and use the word in a richly symbolic way to mean his "shoulder" or his "side." To put our words "home" and "land" together into "homeland" is a little better but not much. A different tradition leaves us tongueless and earless towards this other world of meaning and significance. When we took what we call "land" we took what to them meant home, the source and locus of life, and everlastingness of spirit.<sup>11</sup>*

#### THE SUBSTITUTION OF "BAND" FOR "HOUSEHOLD" IN THE MODEL OF HOME

In her broad literature analysis, Mallett demonstrated that the construct of the family is too narrow to comprise an exclusive association with "home." She also explored the polysemy of "household," noting variations in members' gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and extended family contexts. Yet she also cited ample exemplary accounts (e.g., in Bachelard) of birthing in and childhood memories of homes by family members.<sup>12</sup>

In the traditional Aboriginal context, the occupants of the camp would constitute the equivalent of the household, who are terminologically defined in the anthropological literature as the "band." This would be made up of members of the estate (or clan), together with their spouses and visitors. These are the people, for example, who came together at Dick Roughsey's birthplace camp for seasonal harvests and feast-

ing. However, the social makeup of the residential group or band was always subject to change by a complex range of socioeconomic events in the wider region, resulting in regular transformation of its composition.

Kinship was a driving force behind band sociality, with its extensive networks of relationships derived from exogamous marriage rules and classificatory kinship naming systems. Being enculturated to a kin-oriented Aboriginal society with a strong set of identity relations to places would thus result in a strong relational (as opposed to egocentric or individualistic) sense of personhood. It would also be one in which the field of relations would extend to entities beyond the human, such as sacred sites and totemic beings.<sup>13</sup>

Socioeconomic changes affected people's perceived needs and desires with respect to campsite selection and assembly of desirable visitors. Thus, the notion of the ideal home in the traditional Aboriginal context involved several components: the selection of a familiar campsite; the selection of a shelter type to construct; and the choice of which extended family members and other clan groups to invite for feasting or ceremony (collectively constituting the "band"). This entire complex of concerns might be substituted for house design in Anglo-Australian culture (FIG. 7). The conceptual properties of home and household were thus invested with diverse socio-cultural meanings that varied cross-culturally.

#### HOMELESSNESS DUE TO ISOLATION FROM ONE'S COUNTRY AND KIN

Mallett invoked the notion of homelessness in relation to those who are abused in the home but cannot readily leave — e.g., in the case of an abused child or wife ("homeless at home").<sup>14</sup> A converse situation pertained to those in Aboriginal Australia who were banished from their country or chased away by sorcery. In these cases, while individuals were psychologically damaged in a manner similar to that of a victim of domestic or family violence, they could not return to their home country.

This was especially the case for those who were decreed to have committed religious sacrilege punishable by death, and who were forced to seek permanent asylum out of fear of execution. According to the anthropologist T.G. Strehlow:

*The geographical limitations to the power of the local group leaders made it possible for Aboriginal offenders in the pre-European days to seek asylum in communities not subject to their own elders. If the offence committed was deemed sufficient to merit death in its own community, the distance of the place where asylum was sought was sometimes very great. . . . Asylum did not mean that the local group would protect an offender against the vengeance of his own people: it merely refused to take any punitive action against him, and generally agreed later on to let him take a local wife.<sup>15</sup>*

Anglo-Australian concepts	Traditional Aboriginal concepts
House (a building)	Domiciliary space with hearth and artifacts (may or may not have a shelter depending on season and weather).
Home (one's regularly used house)	Estate or 'country' (contains multiple campsites, resource places and sacred sites).
Household (those living in a home)	Band (patriclan plus spouses and visitors); all maintaining a strong sense of relational personhood.
House design (an architectural notion)	Campsite selection, with targeted resource harvesting strategy and band group invitations to visit and dwell together (messengers sent).

FIGURE 7. Summary comparison of the Anglo-Australian and traditional Aboriginal concepts relating to "house," "home," "household," and "home design."

In such instances, the individual lived under the perpetual threat that a revenge party might suddenly appear, in which case the host group was unlikely to intervene.<sup>16</sup> As part of our “Long Grassers” survey of homeless Aboriginal people in Darwin, we met individuals who fell into this context in contemporary metropolitan settings.<sup>17</sup> The cause was typically perceived to be the threat of sorcery from within their remote homeland communities.

#### TRANSPOSING CULTURAL IDENTITY TO CITY CAMPING

As explained earlier, land is at the root of Lardil properties of place and Lardil people’s sense of identity. Indeed, it is at the root of properties of place and identity among all Aboriginal people who maintain the classical traditional values. How does this translate for those who travel to regional towns and take up a public-place-dwelling lifestyle, and who are then said by authorities to be “homeless” and a problem for society?

Various empirical studies have demonstrated that Indigenous public-place dwellers can be characterized by a number of common attributes. They are people who do not usually pay for their accommodation; who are highly visible in a public setting (sheltering, drinking, rejoicing, arguing, partying and fighting); who have low incomes, of which a substantial part is spent on alcohol; who have generally few possessions (minimal clothes and bedding); and who usually frequent a regular set of places where they camp in small groups and socialize. Because Indigenous people have a tradition of open-air camping, it is not necessarily stressful for them to adopt this style of living for a while, particularly in towns with relatively mild climates. So the customary Indigenous practice of camping without roofed shelter during fine weather contributes to the ease with which such people can readily fall into a public-place-dwelling lifestyle in regional centers.<sup>18</sup>

Continuity of place types and properties throughout the larger environment may further provide mobile individuals with a sense of security and identity in their changing environmental contexts.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the use of small-group customary spatial behaviors by Indigenous people (including Mornington Islanders when traveling in Australian towns and cities) can be seen as a means of transposing behavioral properties onto strange places — making home away from home, and thus helping to maintain Aboriginal identity in alien circumstances (a persistent identity mechanism). In other words, this behavior involves reproducing and maintaining traditional social and domiciliary practices. Indeed, I would argue that this is the case for many Aboriginal people visiting regional cities and state capitals, who fall into a lifestyle of public-place dwelling with their countrymen, and are subsequently deemed to be homeless by local authorities, police, and census collectors.

What is striking, for example, about the Mornington Islanders’ approach to place in the regional city of Mt. Isa is the way in which numerous informal places are comfortably made or maintained using traditional behavioral principles similar to those employed in homeland camps. These are accompanied by a minimal set of artifactual additions and physical structures — simply ground markers and basic necessities such as fires, clean sand, blankets, cooking billy, carrying bags, etc.<sup>20</sup> This is, for example, the case when Mornington Islanders participate in Mt. Isa drinking camps in the bed of the Leichhardt River, which is dry for most of the seasonal year and passes through the center of the city.

#### THE TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF PEOPLE-ENVIRONMENT IN ANALYZING “PLACE,” “HOME,” AND “HOMELESSNESS”

It can be seen in the above argument that bonds between individuals and places generate part of the personal identity of those individuals. Thus people can be seen to be dependent upon the concept of place for their self-identity, just as places are dependent upon humans for their identities. This illustrates the mutual interactional, or transactional, process of people-environment relations as developed by environmental psychologists.<sup>21</sup>

The significance of this transactional process appears to be consistent with a recently reinvigorated analysis of Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological understanding of “place” and “dwelling.” As the philosopher Jeff Malpas has explained, the relation between human identity and place is not unidirectional, where place is deterministic of identity, but rather dynamic and mutually interactive. Thus, each “is appropriated to the other,” so that the place “gathers and is itself gathered,” and identity is “constantly being worked out . . . as encompassing an essential difference and differentiation,” despite the simultaneous relational and unifying aspect of the process.<sup>22</sup> This constant process of the place gathering and of the person being gathered into the place also underlies the nature of “dwelling.” It entails a repeated turning back to the dwelling place, which is performed with “attentiveness, responsiveness,” and “listening and questioning.” Malpas thus explained how Heidegger concluded that “[we] cannot understand ourselves independently of the places in which our lives unfold and are worked out.”

A number of “home” theoreticians, as reviewed by Mallett, have also developed propositions that broadly fit into this transactional model of people-environment relations. Journeys away from home (ranging from trivial to refugee movements) create an experience of home such that journeys “constitute both home and traveller.” That movement, according to Mallett, is “part of the very ‘constitution’ of home itself.”<sup>23</sup> This suggests Heidegger’s description of a simultaneous relational and differentiating process. Indeed, Mallett also concluded that the relation of self and home generates not just a



sense of home but also a sense of identity, with the home as a symbol of self. Thus, multiple concepts of “home” can generate multiple concepts of self, and the experience of “home” is both the in-lived reality and the memory of homes past.<sup>24</sup>

The construct of person and the transactional people-environment frame explain how strong emotional values can arise about “home.” It can also explain how these may become particularly salient in explaining the nature of Indigenous homelessness. Strehlow was one of the first Australian anthropologists to persuasively explain and poetically describe the “overwhelming affection” felt by Aboriginal people for their traditional homeland countries.<sup>25</sup> The various places in their country are not simply aesthetic scenic features; they are recognized in religious constructs as the creative “handiwork of ancestors,” from whom Aboriginal people believe they have descended. Conversely, isolation from homeland brings strong nostalgia, and disconnection from homeland can create far more difficult issues. Let me now present two case studies.<sup>26</sup>

#### HIGHLIGHTING SEPARATION FROM KIN AND COUNTRY: THE CASE OF A.B.

This case study of the man I call A.B. (a pseudonym to protect his identity) is drawn from a legal case in a state court of Australia.<sup>27</sup> Born in the mid-1950s, his babyhood was spent in Aboriginal fringe camps around a rural town in his tribal country. These camps posed environmental health problems, resulting in his hospitalization at age twelve or thirteen months, at a time when his mother was absent and he was allegedly in the care of his maternal uncle. A.B. was then fostered by the state. His white foster parents and their three children provided a caring family environment, and he was generally happy and not wanting — although he began to experience some behavioral problems by age nine. In particular, his bicultural identity began to emerge when he was told about his Aboriginal parentage and when he became the target of inquisitive questioning about his appearance by his Anglo-Australia school-class peer group.

Simultaneously, A.B.’s natural mother entered her second marital relationship, one marred by economic hardship, family violence, and poor health. Once A.B.’s mother separated from her second spouse, she obtained a government rental house where she reared her two older children as well as four younger siblings from her second spouse. The mother then made requests to see A.B. (then aged ten).

A.B.’s Aboriginal enculturation into his tribal culture commenced upon visiting his mother, resulting in a pattern of oppositional behavior at the foster household. A.B. then stayed with his natural mother for a year, immersing himself in a rural-urban Aboriginal lifestyle involving periods of travel and mobility, meeting extended family, new siblings, and cousins, and participating in some bush hunting and food

collection. However, A.B. had ongoing adjustment problems in this lifestyle, and he attempted to physically return to his foster household at least once, but was apprehended by the police. He turned to crime and was punished so severely by his mother that the police removed him from her house for his own safety, and she refused to have him back.

For several years A.B. underwent a difficult period of constant adjustment and movement between the different cultural milieus. He was involved in alcohol abuse and conflicts with the law, and spent time at four state boys’ homes and reformatories, a mental institution, and a new foster parents’ household (a distantly related Aboriginal mother). He also returned to his first foster parents’ household, and finally moved to his elder sister’s household, where he eventually met up again with his mother. He thus engaged in active maintenance of his multiple family relationships and multifaceted identity, but with much conflict.

One day, at age sixteen, A.B. was sent to buy something at the corner shop for his mother, and he took off and did not return to see her for three years. A.B. began a largely independent lifestyle which continued for twelve years — albeit marked by periodic visits to his mother’s house as a type of home base until she died in his early twenties. He had a series of short-term jobs, travel adventures, and various “run-ins” with the law. He was charged with stealing a car, stealing a truck, driving under the influence, speeding, willful damage, and drunk and disorderly conduct, and spent several stints in jail. It was very much the life of a young Aboriginal man seeking adventure and itinerant work, traveling with minimal possessions, and at times it led to him adopting the public-placedwelling or “rough sleeping” lifestyle of a homeless person.

As part of his mobile life he regularly traveled away from relatives’ houses by hitch-hiking, stealing cars, and jumping trains. Ranging out, he had soon traveled across half the continent, into three other states. He said he “just had to keep moving,” and was “just drinking” in all of the places he visited, sleeping rough in parks, river banks, drains, and railway carriages. He said he drank so much because he did not know where he really fitted, and that he felt more comfortable living in parks where he identified with “yellow fellers” (people of part-Aboriginal descent) who shared similar circumstances. However, constant binge drinking also propelled him into trouble with the police. This was, according to my working definition, a descent into spiritual homelessness.

At times when he returned to his home country, A.B. did manage to connect with several older aunts who told him some family history. But when they died, he found he was not able to “fit into” the next (his own) generation. The Aboriginal cultural identity acquired by A.B. was not so much dependent on the knowledge base of classical tribal culture as at early contact, but on the distinct intercultural Aboriginal lifestyle and pan-lifestyle symbols which had emerged for those of the tribal group’s descendants who were dispersed within the state’s capital city and various rural towns.

Traveling on the road with Aboriginal male peers and residing with Aboriginal people always necessitates that one identifies and positions oneself socially. A public-place-dwelling lifestyle involves much social discourse on home communities, life experiences, issues of discrimination, techniques of survival, etc. — all of which engage participants in their own Aboriginality and cultural identity. Where are you from? What's your "skin"?<sup>28</sup> What mob are you? Who is your family? Who do you know that I know? Connections to extended families and sacred histories and sites are social capital in these contexts. Each and every encounter in some small or large way embellishes various facets of Aboriginal identity. Individuals draw on all of these identity aspects to relate to others in their company with whom they wish to achieve social outcomes; they even acculturate non-Aboriginal traits in order to survive.

A.B.'s ongoing social engagement with Aboriginal people and lifestyles (including at funerals), played a role in his enculturation as an Aboriginal person, a family member, and a member of his particular tribal group. But his experience also helped establish his intercultural identity as a state "home boy," an aspect of his identity that would later be described through the concept of a "Stolen Generation." A.B.'s experiences in foster homes and boys' reformatories, as well as being part of his own mob — issues of separation and homecoming — would have been discussed and debated over casks, flagons, and bags of "gunja," and compared with the experiences of other Aboriginal people who had been through similar circumstances.

In his late twenties, A.B. fortunately managed to establish a spousal relation. He married and stabilized his life to some extent, which (although not devoid of psychological problems) enabled him to avoid a full descent into chronic homelessness and what might have been an even more intense episode of spiritual homelessness. In A.B.'s case we note that his relational identity with kin was equally, if not more of, a problem of connection for him than with country.

For a case of someone who descended more intensely into what can be called spiritual homelessness over sixty years, let me now turn to the example of Jack Charles.

#### SEPARATION FROM KIN AND COUNTRY: THE CASE OF JACK CHARLES

The Aboriginal actor Jack Charles was born in September 1943 at Cummeragunja Mission on the Murray River, of a Wiradjuri father and a Bunwurrung, or possibly Yorta Yorta, mother. His knowledge of his parents' identities and his own birth were only to come to him much later, because he was taken from his mother at ten months old (like A.B.) and placed in the Box Hill Boys' Home in Melbourne to become a member of "the Stolen Generation." The balance of evidence suggests that this was a home for white children, and

that Jack was the only Aboriginal inmate in his peer group of about 250. Here he experienced cruel mistreatment and sexual abuse while growing up — so much so that in recent years he joined a civil class legal action against the Salvation Army which ran the home.<sup>29</sup> This was hardly a place to think of as "home" in any of the senses defined by Mallett.

At age 28, in 1971, Charles was involved in establishing the first modern urban Indigenous theater in Australia when, with some six other Aboriginal actors, he cofounded "Nindethana" ("place for corroboree") in Carlton, an inner-suburb of Melbourne. Their first show was called "Jack Charles Is Up and Fighting," with a by-line that read "it's tough for us Boongs in Australia today."<sup>30</sup> Charles became an eminent actor after 1971, playing in various parts as the drunk recalcitrant oppositional black, the angry aggressive reactionary, appearing in many films and plays, including television programs, and continuing to do so for decades (FIGS. 8, 9).

In 2012 Charles applied for an Australia Council Grant to write his autobiography, but he was informed he had to prove his Aboriginality (despite his visually striking Aboriginal appearance and national reputation as an authentic Aboriginal actor). He was widely reported in the media as attacking this policy, which had "rudely abused" him, and professing his difficulty as a Stolen Generation person to discover any information about his background.<sup>31</sup> This hinted at the strong sense of loss of connection he had with the families of his biological parents and their home countries.

A filmmaker, Amiel Courtin-Wilson, created a documentary on Jack Charles by following his life for seven years (c.2001–07) as he moved in his late fifties and early sixties between residing in street squats, prisons, and briefly in some flats, culminating in a strong resolution by Jack to overcome his heroin habit.<sup>32</sup> The film reveals him to be a compelling individual — intelligent, humorous, somewhat cheeky, articulate, reflective, and always self-analyzing — a sociological commentator on the plight of Aboriginal people and their lifestyles, which he portrayed in his acting but also by being very honest about his circumstances and plight. The film, *Bastardry*, provided powerful insights into his recurring life-course themes: acting on stage and in cine-productions with teams of professional personnel, street busking, heroin consumption (with various attempts to reform onto methadone), recidivist burglary, regular imprisonment, and a pattern of rough sleeping that regularly rendered him technically homeless for intermittent periods.

In the film, one of his "squats" is shown to be an under-the-house laundry. As he says, "I used this place seven years off and on. . . . People know I sleep here and they don't mind. . . . I clean up my tell-tale signs . . ." (referring to syringes). Another of his portrayed overnight habitats is an under-the-house storage space with rough brick walls and gravelly floor, swept a little to make a sleeping space, with a ceiling lower than head-height. Jack points out holes and cracks that leak cold air at night, and he reflects on how to make it warm in a



FIGURE 8. Poster advertising the stage production “Jack Charles V. The Crown,” presented by the Ilbijerri Theatre Company, 2014.

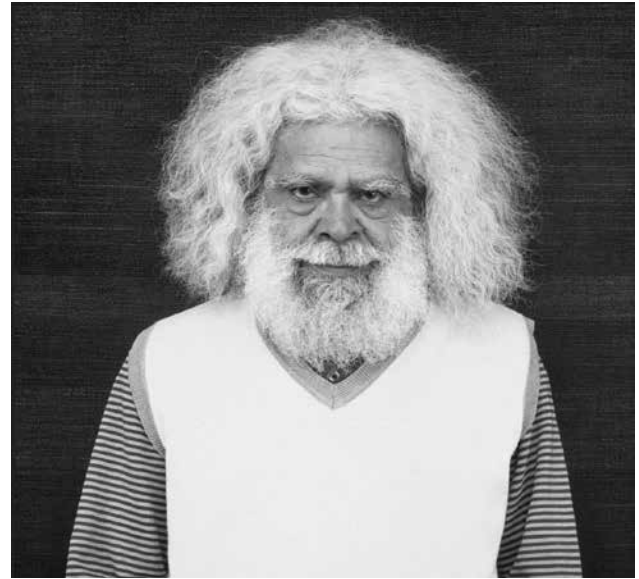


FIGURE 9. Award-winning photograph of Jack Charles by Rod McNicol, 2011.

severe Melbourne winter. He confers in a reflective moment: “You could say [this place is] the sign of being a very lonely person; I suppose I am lonely. . . . I seem to be comfortable being lonely. It hasn’t worried me unduly. I’m relaxed about that.” Jack has been constantly looking for a “good place” to stay (like a bedsitter).

Jack reflects on being orphaned as a baby (a stolen child), and admits he was never physically held as a child — a powerful metaphor for the absence of parental intimacy. And he speaks of being enculturated to remain constantly singular, alone, and self-reliant. But he also concedes having entertained suicide at times. In a scene of Jack Charles sitting in the concealed daytime setting of a large bushy tree merged with nature, he reflects:

*When you’re taken from your mum, you know . . . like [at] ten months . . . and you’re placed in a home to boot . . . you know . . . and raised as a white person; nobody never taught me none, or anything like this . . . in a loving situation. [I was] never held [in a human’s arms]; I can’t remember anything like this as a baby. You become immune to sensitivity. They don’t allow you to be sensitive.*

Jack confides in the only person he ever loved, a homosexual partner who eventually left him “because I got to know what loving a person was. . . . I blamed it all on the fact that I’d never had a relation with a person.” He mentions how when the split-up happened he felt “very sick . . . [enough] to vomit . . . the day he left.” But then, he concedes, “it was good for me; I got to know what loving a person was.” There

are many shots in the documentary of Jack Charles in his role as a film and stage celebrity hugging Koories. But when he comes out of jail, only a single (unidentified in the film) woman meets him. No words are passed, but there is a hint of a more meaningful relationship, albeit with only the one person. It can be noted here that there is some psychological evidence suggesting that an institutionalized childhood can have a negative impact on one’s capacity to form close emotional relationships.<sup>33</sup>

Charles’s burglary practice, carried out in order to maintain his heroin addiction, is targeted on the wealthy two-story mansions of Kew, an upper-class Melbourne suburb, where he brags of robbing one particular house eleven times.<sup>34</sup> Jack equates doing robberies in Kew to collecting the rent from “his” land as a hunter-gatherer, saying: “[I’m] patrolling my land. . . . [Done it] since seventeen; I’ve always done these areas. I’ve been comfortable with Kew.” However, it has only been in recent years that Jack Charles was able to confirm his mother was a traditional descendant of the Bunwurrung people of the Melbourne area.

The documentary reveals Jack Charles’s lifelong capacity to lead a successful professional acting career whenever he comes out of jail. But the film also shows his life as interspersed with constantly recurring periods of dysfunction when he plummets to the depths of introverted isolation and despair. On drugs and in the street he is confronted at these times by his lack of connection within his identity. This life circumstance fits within the definition of a state of spiritual homelessness. His disconnection is clearly with both family and country.

## ON DEFINING SPIRITUAL HOMELESSNESS

Although spiritual homelessness still remains to be empirically researched in depth in Indigenous Australia, this article has outlined some available and informative case studies. In addition, I recently participated with several colleagues in developing a working definition of Indigenous spiritual homelessness, which draws implicitly on the ontology of the Dreamtime religion. Such homelessness is:

*... a state arising from [involuntary] separation from traditional land, and from family and kinship networks (. . . as a result of historical governmental policies), and involving a crisis of personal identity wherein a person's understanding or knowledge of how they relate to country, family and [traditional] Aboriginal identity systems is confused or lacking or if known, unable to be fulfilled. Such feelings add to the already depressed emotional state in which Aboriginal people, either public place dwellers or those at risk of homeless, often find themselves . . . [and] can have serious effects on their mental health, sometimes resulting in self-injury or suicide.<sup>35</sup>*

In this article I have defined “home” in a classical or traditional Aboriginal sense, based on the Lardil case study, as a “homeland” or estate (clan country) comprising multiple place types, and including campsites occupied at different times by bands, as well as Story Places that imbued a Dreaming (totemic) identity upon the members of the estate clan. When the elders of such a homeland from time to time extended an invitation to a wider group of neighbors to visit one of the campsites in their country (assuming there was sufficient capacity for a particular socioeconomic and/or socio-ceremonial event and utilizing seasonal shelter types), it was the equivalent in Western culture of designing a house and inviting guests: the realization of an ideal home. During the colonial and postcolonial periods, persistent collective identity symbols have remained associated with homeland countries among many Aboriginal groups, despite processes of cultural change and a shrinking of the traditional place knowledge of the original estates.

I have further described a transactional model of human-place and human-home identity (drawn from environmental psychology and phenomenology), whereby humans “gather” home places, and home places gather residents. A prolonged severance of a person from the places of home, or from homeland, can result in nostalgia and grief. If severe obstructions prevent any reversal of such, the result can be an inability to construct or maintain positive and meaningful understandings of oneself.

According to the findings of the surveys by my teams of researchers over recent years, these more severe forms of severed identity with homeland and kin did not occur among the majority of public-place-dwelling drinking groups (regarded by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as rough sleepers who

are “homeless”). The reason is their membership was often comprised of “countrymen” or “countrywomen” from a common place or region who activated their capacity to reminisce and celebrate their homeland connections, thereby carrying out a type of maintenance on their place identities.

I first explored this process of separation from kin and country in more detail here through the case of A.B. His descent into spiritual homelessness began as the result of an intermittent lifestyle in his formative years, which involved identity tension and a vacillating engagement between his Aboriginal family and his non-Aboriginal foster family. My second case example, that of Jack Charles, also involves an individual who was removed early in life from an Aboriginal cultural context. It reveals a person who, despite high intelligence and a career path in the mainstream economy, has suffered from a lifelong spiritual homelessness founded in the absence of both a nurturing family and an identity with a homeland. Together with other situational factors, this has resulted in a constant cycle of drug dependency, burglary, imprisonment, and rough sleeping (public-place dwelling).

These case studies indicate that spiritual homelessness arises from disconnection from both kin and country, but in varying degrees and intensities. In this regard, my colleague Daphne Nash has raised the question of which has primacy in the relational ontology (or within one's construct of person) in triggering an episode of spiritual homelessness:

*In non-Indigenous ontology/sociality a person can remain physically/spiritually connected to place by themselves, alone, in ways that an Indigenous person cannot attempt/maintain. For Indigenous Australians the connect to place is mediated through relationships with others, so a break in social relationships comes before/predicates a break with country (whereas a “break” with country is not as severe in consequences if relationships with people are maintained or not completely broken. And increasingly Aboriginal people do not know their traditional connections to country . . . reconstruction of people-land relationships are socially culturally/politically important but people-people relationships are primary.<sup>36</sup>*

Another colleague, Christina Birdsall-Jones, and I have written about how those who are unable to answer the frequently asked questions of where their home country is and to which kin group they belong can suffer from being reminded of a lack of connection to kin and country. These two things, one's people and one's place, are the most significant general features of personhood in the Aboriginal world. To be constantly asked this from childhood to adulthood and never have an answer can wear away on a person's sense of self-esteem.<sup>37</sup>

In cases of spiritual homelessness Birdsall-Jones and I have argued that a psychiatric condition results, which has as yet not been adequately investigated by anthropologists or by the psychological or psychiatric community. In some individ-

uals the condition gives a distinct impression of depression, ranging from moderate to suicidal. But this is also complicated in some sufferers by other culturally specific mental-health conditions, and these require further case-study analysis by suitably qualified researchers and practitioners.<sup>38</sup>

Of value here is the practice work and understanding of the Aboriginal psychologist Joyleen Koolmatrie. Her work has specifically focused on Stolen Generation persons who have been removed from their families at childhood, and in this regard it coincides with the two case studies of homelessness I have presented here. Koolmatrie has drawn on her personal experience as well as that of her Stolen Generation clients to describe the depth of grief that comes with being removed from kin and country. In an article with Ross Williams, she wrote:

*If you've been taken away from your country and your people, then that means you're grieving for everything that you are. You've lost everything. So being taken away — it's not just like a White person being taken away from Mum and Dad. You're been taken away from a place of belonging, a country that's important to you, that's got your dreaming story. That's got your food sources, all your laws in it. . . . You're taken away from your aunts, your uncles, your nephews your nieces; your grandmothers and grandfathers, great-grandfathers looking traditionally back. That's a lot more than a White kid loses. You may also have lost your language by being taken away. . . . Grieving for parents is important but grieving the loss of your culture goes even deeper. . . . You've got a core to who you are that you're grieving, that you've never been allowed to be. . . . There's a real sense of emptiness [which can be passed on to your kids] . . . so kids go out and steal, and run round. There's that, and there's the loneliness that gets passed on.<sup>39</sup>*

Koolmatrie's Stolen Generation syndrome deals with the spiritually homeless context of someone who has failed to establish their relational personhood, especially in association with country and culture. However, it does not deal with those cases where relational personhood has been formed but then is lost or prevented from being manifested or maintained, as in the case of those banished or alienated from their homeland. It is clear, then, that substantiated work remains if reliable diagnostic tools and treatment programs are to be developed to address spiritual homelessness as I have defined it here. Koolmatrie and Williams have provided a set of practice principles for Stolen Generation victims that draw on collective narrative therapy and enable grief release. And in this regard, they have pointed the way toward culturally appropriate healing programs that will specifically alleviate the syndrome of spiritual homelessness.

Other culturally relevant frameworks of current practice and therapeutic techniques also need to be explored, however, to establish methods of addressing spiritual homelessness for individual clients. Among others, these may include Indig-

enous emotional well-being approaches<sup>40</sup>; Indigenous men's anger therapies<sup>41</sup>; Wanganeen's cultural healing model<sup>42</sup>; Indigenous behavior setting practice<sup>43</sup>; and other emerging Indigenous mental health practices.<sup>44</sup>

#### RELATION TO TRADITIONAL DWELLING PRACTICES

Of the strategies noted above, what I have called Indigenous behavior setting practice is perhaps of greatest interest to scholars of traditional environments. I have recently been exploring the therapeutic value of these settings to assist with transformation back into a form of normative Aboriginal lifestyle incorporating salient dimensions of traditional personhood.

Indigenous behavior settings involve recurring behavior patterns in a spatially interrelated set of physical settings, with the intent to reestablish a synomorphic relationship, or close "fit," between the human behavior episodes that occur and the physical and temporal environments of the settings. The effort is largely controlled by Indigenous people; and it is designed by Indigenous leaders, sometimes in collaboration with an architect. It incorporates a combination of behavioral patterns and environmental (landscaping) features, artificial features (built and loose structures, objects), and setting controls designed to be relatively comfortable, predictable, secure, and suitable for use by Indigenous people. There is also a sense of identity with, and even ownership of, such a system of settings by Indigenous people.

The recent application of behavior setting theory highlights the significance of contemporary settings, created by Indigenous people, for the positive maintenance of their well-being.<sup>45</sup> Indigenous (or cross-cultural) behavior setting theory thus makes an important contribution to the emerging concept of cultural sustainability in architecture.<sup>46</sup>

A recently published case study that describes what would qualify as an Indigenous behavior setting according to the above definition is titled "Older Men at the Marae: Everyday Practices for Being Māori." It analyzes how the setting facilitates efforts by a group of homeless men to "find respite, reconnection, a sense of belonging, and remember Māori ways of being" through gardening and other everyday practices. This occurs in a Māori community complex, situated high on a prominent headland overlooking the Auckland harbor.<sup>47</sup>

The case studies in this paper have provided a means of understanding the two categories of mobile public-place-dwelling Australian Aboriginal people: those who are reproducing their traditions in foreign places, and those who are unable to reconnect with their traditions of homeland and kin, and are thereby experiencing an incapacity to achieve a self-identity that allows a sense of well-being, and which then transforms into a state of grief and of being spiritually bereft. Strategies to heal such people should involve a mix of psychological, social, spiritual, and environmental design techniques and therapies.

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