Place as a Social Determinant of Health: Narratives of Trauma and Homeland among Palestinian Women

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Abstract

Despite calls for greater social work attention to the centrality of place in human life, the profession has yet to hone frameworks that fully capture the role of place in individual–collective identity and well-being. To move this agenda forward, this article draws on data from a series of focus groups to explore the placed experiences of women in Palestine. Analytically, it is informed by *critical place inquiry*, which emphasises the deeply interactional relationships between people and places, views place-centred practice and research as catalysts for active responses to the spatialised nature of power and injustice, and focuses centrally on the geographic and spatial dynamics of colonisation, and particularly settler colonialism, as key determinants of individual and collective well-being. Women’s spatial narratives revolved around individual–collective identity and sovereignty, focusing in particular on three interdependent factors: freedom of movement; possession and dispossession; and continuity of place. Findings also illuminated spatial practices of resistance by which women defend and promote identity and sovereignty. We conclude with recommendations for more explicit, critically informed attention to place in social work practice, education and research.

Keywords: Palestine, place, resilience, settler-colonialism, trauma

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There are urgent calls for social work practice, research and pedagogy to explicitly address the social determinants of health (SDOH) (Craig *et al.*, 2013; American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW, 2016)). Inherent in the definition of SDOH as ‘the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age’ (World Health Organisation, n.d.) is a recognition that everyday life settings are deeply implicated in inequities in health outcomes (Albrecht, 2010; Fullilove, 1996). Nonetheless, the particular role of place—the meaningful context of people’s lives—as a social determinant of health tends to be overlooked. Noting this gap, de Leeuw (2018) argues for adding a deliberate focus on geography to the ‘health equity toolbox’ (p. 189) and, specifically, for ‘activating place as an important determinant of health’ (p. 195).

Despite calls for more robust attention to place in social work (Akesson *et al.*, 2017; Jack, 2010; Kemp, 2010; Zapf, 2010), the profession has yet to fully engage with the implications of place for individual–collective identity, belonging and well-being. To move this agenda forward, this article presents findings on women’s place experiences, which emerged from a series of focus groups with women in Palestine. Our analytics revolve around ‘critical place inquiry’, which regards deeply interactional relationships between people and places as key determinants of individual and collective health and well-being, and views place-centred practice and research as catalysts for active responses to the spatialised nature of power and injustice—particularly within settler colonialism (Tuck and McKenzie, 2015). Critical place inquiry is well suited our study’s focus on the health implications of settler colonialism, which is characterised by deliberate, violent attempts to conquer and control indigenous place and land (Smith, 2012; Tuck and McKenzie, 2015).

A growing body of work on health and settler colonialism underscores the need for critically informed, geographically specific analyses of the SDOH in relation to the well-being of indigenous populations (Czyzewski, 2011; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Richmond and Ross, 2009; Walters *et al.*, 2011). These frameworks link indigenous people’s psycho-social experiences, their experiences in and of place, and spatialised strategies of power and control such as removal, dispossession, destruction, containment and militarisation. Despite these emerging bodies of work, research in settings characterised by settler colonialism often overlooks the significance of these multi-faceted people–place relationships (Tuck and McKenzie, 2015; de Leeuw, 2018). While the research reported here was conceptualised within a post-colonial framework, place was not an explicit *a priori* theme. However, we found that it is nearly impossible to do research in this area without recognition that the politics of and violations to place are core to the experience of Palestinians. Thus, in the analysis phase, as we explored and interpreted our data, we centered these connections.

Place in Palestine

The politics of place for Palestinians have been well-articulated, as settler colonialism in this location underlies highly racialised violence that is inextricably tied to Israel's ongoing geographic expansion (Salamanca *et al.*, 2012; Salita, 2016; Sayegh, 1965). Encroachment into and control of place is so central to the Israeli project of state-building that the deliberate targeting of land as a strategy of control and removal of Palestinians has been described as 'spacio-cide' (Hanafi, 2009). Towns, and even homes, have been cut in half by measures such as a system of Israeli-only roads and a 712 km-long wall, which ostensibly separates Israel and the West Bank but actually winds throughout the West Bank, creating enclaves of Palestinian land surrounded by watchtowers (some with snipers every 400 m), checkpoints, electric fences, trace paths, barbed wire, cameras and trenches (B'Tselem, 2017). In July 2007, when this study began, the United Nations reported that approximately one-third of the West Bank was off limits to Palestinians, taken up instead by Israeli infrastructure, including the wall, settlements and military areas (UN-OCHA, 2007). This system of closures severely controls Palestinian use of indigenous land and restricts the movement of Palestinian civilians, impeding access to work, family, places of worship and health care. Given these dynamics, it is not surprising that scholarship on the well-being of Palestinians clearly points to importance of attention to the critical role of place in shaping health outcomes (Akesson, 2011; Atallah, 2017; Barber *et al.*, 2014; Giacaman *et al.*, 2007; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006; Sousa *et al.*, 2014).

Theoretical underpinnings: place attachment and identity, freedom and power

Bonding between people and places not only entails cognitive and affective, but also embodied processes, wherein experiences in place inscribe themselves on the body through our senses and emplaced practices (Kemp, 2010). Two intertwined theoretical elements—place attachment and place identity—are particularly relevant to understanding the individual and collective harms caused by the spatial experiences of settler colonialism. Over time, our experience of place leads to place attachment: a salutogenic sense of embeddedness and belonging within individuals, families, communities and cultures (Low and Altman, 1992; Scannell and Gifford, 2010). Place attachment helps us to derive an emplaced sense of meaning related to our individual and collective concept of ourselves, often across generations, and thus facilitates place identity (Low and Altman, 1992; Proshansky *et al.*, 1983).

Appreciation for the profound importance of place attachment and identity is an important theme in indigenous scholarship, which underscores the centrality of land and place in indigenous cosmologies, life-ways and identity (Meyer, 2001). In the context of indigenous 'land-we' ontologies (Tuck and McKenzie, 2015, p. 56), the place-centred violence of settler colonialism assaults not only the supports and safety afforded by physical environments but also the roots of culture, collective identity and communal knowledge, often across generations (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Raphael *et al.*, 1998).

Place attachment and place identity depend on sovereign use of place. Unfettered rights to public and private space therefore are central to the meaning we derive from our place experiences (Cooper-Marcus, 1992; Tyner, 2012). Indeed, Tuan (1977) asserts: 'freedom implies space; it means having the power and enough room in which to act' (p. 52). Our everyday capacity to move freely through places, or not, has significant implications for individual and collective health, well-being and identity, as spatial practices of freedom and constraint inscribe meaning upon our bodies and shape individual and collective imaginations of who we are and what we might be (Bourdieu, 2002; Lefebvre, 1991). Thus, seemingly mundane place experiences reflect relationships to, and negotiations with, larger structures of power (Cummins *et al.*, 2007): 'inclusion and exclusion, privilege and inequality, dominance and oppression...take place not in but *through* place' (Kemp, 2010, p. 123). The relationship between place, power and freedom is particularly important to explore within settings characterised by colonialism, which often relies on spatial practices in the overall aim of curtailing collective sovereignty and identity.

As place is inextricably intertwined with power, it is also harnessed for resistance. Research in Palestine illuminates the strategies Palestinian women use to exercise agency in place despite oppressive spatial practices (Richter-Devroe, 2011; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006) and indicates that spatial practices of resistance are intimately tied to the defence of collective identity and culture (Moore, 1998). Building on this work, here we present findings derived from an analysis of Palestinian women's narratives to explore how women navigate spatial dynamics of power and control as they mobilise place for individual and collective well-being and survival.

Methods

Background

The research described here arose from a larger study initiated by a researcher from the USA who worked at the behest of the Palestinian

Medical Relief Society (PMRS) to explore the health implications of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian West Bank. The research partnership includes both insider and outsider positionalities; we hold in common our aim to foreground ‘Palestinians as the makers of Palestinian history’ (Barakat, 2018, p. 350). To fully engage in the kind of inquiry this commitment entails, the lead researcher (the US-based academic) began with an ethnographic approach, conducting participant observation over three summers (2007, 2008 and 2009), and included extended field work, including daily ride-alongs with health personnel and ongoing travel and collaboration with local research partners. Already mindful of the Orientalist nature of much so-called knowledge building about the ‘East’ by Western scholars (Said, 1978), immersion in fieldwork further deepened her careful reflection on what constitutes responsible ‘outsider’ research engagement and representation, particularly given that she was very much a power holder and broker in the research process due to the advantages of her citizenship status, class and professional status. This extended fieldwork surfaced several themes that became research priorities, including individual-collective sovereignty, identity and the role of place.

All methods were approved by the Human Subjects Division at The University of Washington; every participant gave informed consent, done through a prepared script delivered in Arabic. Following the first summer of field work, a collaborative research team led five focus groups in 2008 with adult Palestinian women ($N=32$). Due to concerns about privacy and comfort, we did not collect demographics of participants; however, we do know ages ranged from very young adult women to quite elderly. We also sought a diversity of locations, holding focus groups in five distinct sectors of the West Bank: Al Khalil (Hebron) (5), Nablus (7), Jerusalem (4), Qalqiliya (10) and Tulkarem (6).

We used focus groups, conducted in Arabic by a member of the research team, because of the possibilities of this method to open up a dialogical process and inspire narratives wherein women might speak both as individuals and as members of a larger community (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005; Madrí, 1998; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2011). In offering the potential for collective reflection, focus groups hold the potential to ‘liberate’ collective stories, aiding with coping and empowerment (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003, p. 396). We collaboratively developed open questions to guide women in sharing their reflections about the effects of the occupation on individuals, families and communities.

The lead researcher and the Palestinian focus group facilitator did line-by-line coding independently, using in vivo coding and coding for processes, emotions and consequences (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Saldaña, 2016). Codes were logged with detailed descriptions and linked to theories and participant observation data (photographs, field notes and maps of places travelled). In the tradition of content analysis, we

Figure 1: Conceptual model

used both inductive and deductive approaches, in which we both applied and sought to further existing theories (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Although not an explicit *a priori* theme or research question, not surprisingly, place emerged as a central theme. To inform our analysis and interpretation of these emergent findings, we drew on Western notions of place, place attachment and place identity, deployed within a critical framework informed by indigenous understandings of place within settler colonialism (Richmond and Ross, 2009; Tuck and McKenzie, 2015). We created several mindmaps that we revised to help elucidate connections among and processes within the themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The final mindmap became the conceptual model along which we organised the findings presented here (Figure 1).

Findings

The stability of geography and the continuity of land—these have completely disappeared from my life and the life of all Palestinians (Said, 1999, p. 19).

Palestine is a beautiful place; how can we give it up? (focus group participant).

As women discussed the effects of political violence on health and well-being, their accounts centred on how their place experiences influenced individual and collective sovereignty and identity. Our analyses revealed that individual–collective identity and sovereignty, in turn, depended on three interdependent spatial factors: constraints on freedom of movement; possession and dispossession; and and continuity of

place (Figure 1). Following the themes depicted in Figure 1, we first present our analysis of women's accounts of constraints on access to everyday places and resources in four domains: resources central to well-being (education, health care and financial opportunities); extended family and community; cultural and religious sites and land. We also explore how women connected freedom of movement to possession of, dispossession from, and continuity of land. Our second set of findings illuminates spatial practices of resistance-how women harness place to defend and promote individual-collective identity and sovereignty.

Access to everyday resources: Education, health care and financial opportunities

Women's accounts emphasised the multiple ways in which appropriation and control of Palestinian land interrupted access to places and resources vital to individual and collective well-being. Their narratives highlighted the anger and anguish they felt when their children were unable to access schools or critical examinations because of checkpoints, the wall and Israeli settler or military violence. Several women also described constraints on their ability to access medical care for their families, including being unable to cross checkpoints to get to hospitals or clinics with their children or to access medication. As one woman explained, 'In the past, if I needed some medicine or something, I could get it quickly but now it is hard to get it quickly'. They also shared stories about women they knew of who had given birth at checkpoints because they were stuck there and health professionals who encountered humiliation and violence during travels to their places of work or in reaching patients. Some of the women in the focus groups worked at the medical NGO that organized the groups; these women talked about not being allowed to cross checkpoints even when they were on official duty or being delayed for so long and so often that it substantially interrupted their work.

As well, women described how they and their communities were impeded in their efforts to access opportunities for training or advancement. Since education was often described by women as vital to resistance and resilience, they interpreted these interruptions as attempts to hinder individual-collective success and sovereignty. One woman's narrative, for example, moved from a description of her personal experience of waiting at a checkpoint and being delayed and fingerprinted to reflection on the larger forces at play: 'That's their main aim—to control and delay us. Even in education, they don't want us to move forward in education'.

Threats to place, and to the freedom to access place, also threaten individual and family livelihoods. Many women pointed out that access to land, once central to economic opportunity and stability, was now significantly curtailed: 'They used to sow crops but now they can not use this land'. Women described how men used to own businesses that were now demolished, to work land that was now inaccessible or to travel into Israel or other parts of the West Bank to work but were now prohibited from doing so. In the narrative below, a woman from Qalqilya district describes the 'economically suffocating' impact of these spatial controls and her perceptions of the reasons behind them:

In the first intifada, there were [still] opportunities for them to work. The land was still more accessible—you could get crops from them. Before the intifada—the first one—the people had agreements together. That's why [now] the army economically suffocated the people—they closed the economy. Before, there was commerce, and merchants, people were together And that's why they started building the wall and confiscating the land. And the water, and work—why they stopped access to this.

The dynamic communicated by this narrative is depicted in [Figure 2](#). Taken by the first author in the Qalqilya district, where the woman from this focus group lived and to which she refers, this photograph shows a gate controlled by Israeli military to severely restrict Palestinian access to their agricultural lands. Earlier, this area was a robust farming district, with a vibrant economy based on agriculture and trade between Israelis and Palestinians. Now, Palestinians wait at Israeli military installations to gain access to their land.

Access to community and family

A key effect of the Israeli policy of closures and land confiscation, especially in relation to social relationships and emotional health, is the physical separation it imposes on extended families and neighbouring villages. One woman stated, 'Months and months we cannot even see our relatives. That weakens our community'. Another woman described its effects on community relationships in the Jerusalem district:

This whole area—we were all living together before, before they came and separated us. Even now, it's still going on—we still have a relationship with the other people, but they are on the other side.

Women talked about not being able to see family members in other villages and children not being able to see their relatives. One woman

Figure 2: Gate and militarised area where Palestinians wait to get access to their lands. Photograph by Sousa, C.

spoke about having to choose between her maternal family in Qalqilya and her husband in Gaza:

I am a married woman. My husband is from Gaza. Once I came here to visit my mother, who is ill. They forbid me to go back to Gaza unless I sign papers stating I would not return here. They wanted to deport me. Up to this day, I am away from my husband. My child keeps asking me, ‘When are we going back?’

Access to religious and cultural sites

Constraints on movement in Palestine also curtail access to sites of historical, religious and cultural significance. In the focus groups, women described the pleasure they and their families get when they are able to visit historically important places, stating that the children especially ‘like to go and see’ places like the Dome of the Rock and that ‘it makes us happy to go to historical places with our kids’.

Yet, trips to significant places such as the Dome of the Rock and the Dead Sea require infrequently granted permits and often take an entire day because of checkpoints. And even when permission is given, women’s experiences of being in these ancestral places evidence a range of

negative emotions: feelings of being controlled and degraded; jealousy, sadness and anger at others having free access while they are severely restricted and a profound sense of injustice at the betrayal of international agreements that should allow them freedom of access.

One woman, for example, described the pain associated with controls on Palestinian access to Dead Sea, noting that her family had to beg to be allowed to swim. The woman went on to underscore the particular grief associated with being denied access to ‘your own land and water’ while at the same time Israelis were freely enjoying place: ‘They have everything—the playground, the water—but we don’t have anything’.

Another woman’s narrative reveals the range of emotions triggered by prohibitions on freedom of access to place and land that historically were ‘ours’. Her language is multilayered, combining significant personal sadness with frustration and pain because she saw her lack of free access to the Dead Sea as being in violation of international agreements (and historical rights of sovereignty):

We cross a lot of checkpoints by the time we get to the sea we’re anxious to go swim and they refused to let us and made us leave. We were forced to go back. The sea is ours-not like the Mediterranean-but in the agreements, it should be ours, but we can’t even visit it. This happens a lot, the checkpoints and the limitations in access, so we get so fed up and frustrated. You feel so sad and depressed because the Dead Sea is ours but you cannot go swim in it.

Continuity of land

Edward Said (1999) described Palestinians as being ‘confined to frightened little islands in an inhospitable environment of superior military force’ (pp. 19–20). When asked about the effects of the occupation, women’s answers regularly focused on descriptions of how Israelis increasingly constrict Palestinians to shrinking, bounded enclaves via ever-growing restrictions in access. As one person shared, ‘The lands are separated and the homes are separated. Everything is separated’. Women described the networks of closures as relentless: ‘Even in simple places, you see checkpoints, you just walk a little and you see another, you walk a little more and you see another’. Border walls, checkpoints and Israeli only settlements and roads fundamentally alter familiar natural environments—described with a sense of mourning: ‘They change the scenery, they cut trees, the checkpoints—they changed so much in the environment around the checkpoints’. In their explanations of the changes to the Palestinian landscape, women’s narratives typically linked this phenomenon to Israeli spatial practices of surveillance and control

that divest Palestinians of access to their traditional lands: 'They cleared all of these checkpoints so they can see from far away. Unfortunately that's our land but we are afraid to cross because they are watching you'.

The consequences of these ongoing practices of Israeli appropriation of Palestinian place were captured by the ways women spoke of being 'blocked', 'limited' and 'shut off from everything'. Their narratives revealed not only to intense personal feelings of humiliation, anxiety, frustration and grief but also to what was repeatedly described as collective 'suffocation'. In speaking of threats to the continuity and coherence of Palestinian land, women moved almost seamlessly from individual, practical experiences of place to collective, representational ones, as we will describe further.

Possession and dispossession

Narratives of spatial constraint and fragmentation in our data frequently began with accounts of hassles associated with spatial barriers and controls and the negative impact of these on key daily activities (accessing school, work, health care, friends and family). However, women's accounts typically moved quickly from personal frustrations to the meanings women derive from the experiences. Woven throughout their descriptions about the practices that threaten and curtail freedom of movement and continuity of land was an insistence that Israel's attempts at controlling and limiting Palestinians' use of their land are not random events but rather reveal a larger project of dispossession. Women spoke of how constraints on mobility and access to place 'limit' Palestinians, resulting in what one woman called a 'stagnation' of their society. Speaking to this point, a woman explained, 'that's their main aim-to delay people on the checkpoints. They want to try to control them and delay us, even in education-they don't want us to go forward in education'. Here, she moves from telling us about practical experience to expressing her interpretation of the political goals that underlie these kinds of spatial constrictions. Understood this way, narratives from other participants such as, 'they seek to block us' and 'everything is closed in our face—nothing is open to us' reveal both individual, corporeal experiences and the meanings Palestinians understand these spatial practices to hold for individual and collective sovereignty.

The first author's ethnographic field work, put together with our analysis of women's narratives, supported the notion that in Palestine, spatial constraints are absorbed visually and thus viscerally. Israeli checkpoints, military outposts and settlements loom from almost every hill and mountain in the West Bank, signalling not only constant

Figure 3: Palestinian road interrupted by Israeli settlement and settler-only road. Photograph by Sousa, C.

surveillance but also powerful claims to place wherein Palestine, once a whole, is divided and disconnected (Weizman, 2007). Figure 3 (taken by first author) provides a visual example. The driver, a doctor who was giving the first author a tour of the region, brought the vehicle up to a road closed off to Palestinians that bisects (and therefore ends) a traditional Palestinian road; an Israeli settlement looms high in the background.

Reflecting on the social impacts of land appropriation and fragmentation, women said things such as: ‘The separation affected us psychologically because we were one people’. Here, as in other similar narratives, women conveyed a historically rooted longing for continuity of land and the closely related assurance of collective identity.

The oppressive nature of daily experiences of denial and dispossession, both individually and collectively, is graphically illustrated by a woman who described the wall as ‘slaughtering us slowly’:

If you want to go inside it’s like you are a beggar. If you want to go, there’s certain times you can go and you have to have your ID with you because they might harm you at times. It’s possible they might not let you in. In all the counties, all the Palestinian counties, it’s the same thing—the wall is slaughtering us slowly.

Spatial practices of resistance and resilience

Although the spatial practices of occupation profoundly hinder their movement and autonomy, the Palestinian women in the focus groups clearly expressed their determination to also find ways to navigate around the controls placed on them. They spoke, for example, of negotiating with soldiers and Israeli civilians and of everyday acts of defiance such as refusing to speak Hebrew at checkpoints. The balancing acts entailed in these efforts can be seen in this woman's account of negotiating her way through a checkpoint with her daughter by pretending not to understand what the soldiers were saying:

Sometimes I take my daughter and at the checkpoint sometimes the Israeli soldiers start joking and laughing [flirting] with us. But I don't reciprocate this joke with them because I want to show them I don't like their jokes. They start speaking in Hebrew and my daughter understood they were making jokes but I pretended I didn't understand them.

Exemplified in this narrative are both the skills required and the resilience built through strategising against the disempowering and humiliating nature of checkpoints (Hammami, 2006, 2015). Another older woman spoke of her defiance of Israeli soldiers as she visited her son who had been jailed. She described how she spoke to her son through the wire fence, not letting the prison walls intimidate her. She ended her narrative with, 'I told the Israeli forces, I saw my son and that's all I wanted so do whatever you want. We need to be strong'. This woman's story demonstrates her ingenuity in finding a way to see and talk with her son. It also epitomises the claiming of space in order to defy occupation and engender strength not only for oneself but as a collective: to show one's people that 'we need to be strong'.

Women connected the land to Palestine and love of land to love of Palestine: 'We become very sad with what's going on in it. For us, our land, Palestine, is very precious'. One woman said, for example, 'Even with the army and the occupiers—those people who still have their land in their name, they still take their permit and go to their land'. Another woman said, 'One has to be connected to his land; it's impossible for anyone to leave his land and go like this'. Women's narratives also revealed the importance of connection to the land in helping people endure the unrelenting stress of occupation. As one woman stated: 'We're going to stay here no matter what'.

In claiming place and land, not only through actions (where possible) but also in unfaltering 'geographies of the imagination' (Said, 1978), women attempt to defend not only the coherence of place and self but also generational rights to and connection with a contiguous Palestine:

In the end, finally, this is our land and our country and we cannot give it away. This is our land and our homes and they occupied us; we're not going to give it to them. Somehow, someday we'll come back to our land...We are not going to leave it for them; we're going to hold on to it. Because our grandparents and their grandparents have been buried here and this is our land...

Discussion

Practices of spatial control inherent in settler colonisation described by the women in our study illuminated how constraints on freedom of movement, threats to continuity of land (and to attachments to place) and experiences of dispossession converge. Importantly, women characterised their everyday spatial experiences as illustrative of how the structures of the Israeli occupation of Palestine are devised to interrupt access to traditional and agricultural lands, economic relationships and opportunities for work and thus undermine both individual and collective self-determination and identity. The spatial constraints on Palestinian economic and social territory they describe undergird what [Roy \(2016\)](#) terms the deliberate 'de-development' of Palestine. Descriptions of daily frustrations and indignities in our data therefore illuminate not only the barriers they experienced personally and as families—to earning income, gaining education, accessing health care, meeting each other and travelling—but also a larger concern: that the relentless spatial controls Palestinians experience are a process of dispossession aimed at threatening the collective unity, future and sovereignty of Palestine ([Falah, 2003](#); [Hammami, 2006](#); [Smith, 2011](#)).

At the same time, our data demonstrate that attachments to and use of place are also sources of strength and resilience, ways to reclaim, as Lefebvre puts it the 'practical capabilities and sovereign powers' over our physical environments that enable our communities to function well (1991, p. 34). As women highlighted in their narratives, whether within homes, daily trips through checkpoints or pilgrimages, women protect practical, legal and cultural claims to place, thereby safeguarding relationships among homeland, intergenerational continuity, survival and cultural memory ([Johnson, 2006](#); [Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006](#); [Tawil-Souri, 2011](#)).

Regarding the limitations to this study, while focus groups were a powerful method for eliciting narratives in a collective setting, they also reflect the stories of a limited number of respondents. As well, individual or competing narratives may be subsumed within or silenced by collective stories ([Seaton, 2008](#); [Sim, 1998](#)). While we took great care to promote dialogue and disagreement, group settings may have limited the variability and depth of our data. As well, an explicit focus on place

from the outset of the project may have helped us to develop a stronger set of data around this topic and led us to use more diverse, spatially oriented research methods to explore the theme of place more deeply.

Implications

These limitations notwithstanding, our findings are consistent with literature documenting relationships between threats to place and indigenous well-being (Czyzewski, 2011; Richmond and Ross, 2009; Walters *et al.*, 2011) and with arguments for more deliberate attention to place in conceptualisations of SDOH (de Leeuw, 2018). Our study, therefore, adds weight to calls for social work to better integrate critically informed approaches to place inquiry and intervention, particularly those which engage with the inherently 'placed' relationships among indigeneity, settler colonialism, individual and collective self-determination, sovereignty and well-being (Tuck and McKenzie, 2015). Across social work theory, pedagogy and practice, we can a better job of understanding and professionally engaging with the multidimensional, dynamic experiences of 'place', particularly as they relate to the politics of power and multiple struggles for individual–collective sovereignty and dignity.

Key elements of this task include developing and incorporating critical interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological frameworks that help us conceptualise 'place,' and its connection to power and violence, in multi-layered ways. To this end, we must undertake serious engagement with indigenous epistemologies surrounding place and land. This requires critical reflexivity on how place is shaped by power and privilege, particularly related to colonialism, as well as exploration of one's own place experiences and concomitant epistemological assumptions. Regarding theory, it is essential we prioritise and build upon frameworks that help us examine the relationships between power, place and well-being. These provide a foundation for research rooted in creative and collaborative research modalities, including community-based participatory research, and the use of sketch maps, participatory GIS and arts-based approaches (D'Amico *et al.*, 2016; Kwan, 2008; Smith, 2016; Wallerstein *et al.*, 2017). Regarding education and preparation for practice, strengthening our pedagogical focus on place coincides with the movement for social work education to better confront and counter multiple, ongoing consequences of colonisation (Tamburro, 2013)—and not, as Tuck and Yang (2012) emphasise, in a metaphoric sense, but in a sense that recognises the centrality of land and place. Students should interact with place-focused practice methods and models (i.e. walking tours with community members, participatory mapping and neighbourhood interventions); field practica and research projects afford important

opportunities for developing place-oriented expertise (Crane *et al.*, 2018).

Taken together with the growing body of scholarship on the topic, our findings make clear that expanding critical attention to place within social work is important. In developing a greater responsiveness to how place influences well-being, we must dedicate more scholarly and practical attention to how place experiences are intertwined with dynamics of power and privileges, particularly within settler colonialism (Hiller and Carlson, 2018). In so doing, we may mobilise our profession to better understand the importance of, and to actively support, indigenous self-determination, for, as the women in our study asserted, it is not only place but the right to place—and to safety and self-determination in place—that is fundamental to individual and collective well-being (Akesson *et al.*, 2016; Cummins *et al.*, 2007; de Leeuw, 2018).

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