The Ethics of Homelessness

Philosophical Perspectives

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Edited by

G. John M. Abbarno

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The Coloniality of Homelessness

Kevin Scott Jobe

1 Introduction

In 2013, the Wolf Point, Montana police department conducted a police sweep of indigenous citizens in preparation for a popular rodeo tourist attraction. According to the lawsuit filed against the City of Wolf Point, 30–50 indigenous citizens were forcefully removed from the event space, taken in police custody and sequestered in makeshift outdoor holding cells in order to prevent the perceived homeless population from panhandling during the event.[1] In order to prevent federal prosecution for violation of civil rights, the police did not file formal charges, so that there would be no record of the police action. However, an internal investigation acknowledged that the police sweep did happen. According to the lawsuit, police regularly referred to the native population in the city as "Homeless, Winos, Street People, Tree People, Drug Addicts, Alcoholics, or Prairie Niggers," and that the police action was "directly related to the racial classification and profiling of the American Indians" of the community, and led to "personal injury, inhuman treatment and cruel and unusual punishment."[2]

The plaintiffs' argument in the Wolf Point case concerning the racial classification of the homeless is supported by recent research in psychology on how implicit knowledge of racial stereotypes actually alters our visual perception of bodies along a colonial hierarchy of value. Goff and colleagues found that "subjects in the United States associate African-American physiognomies with crime and danger more frequently than they do Euro-American physiognomies," which in turn provides "fertile ground the racializing of crime along lines similar to the racialization of intelligence."[3] Goff and colleagues situate

1 Kelly Weill, "Lawsuit: Racist Rodeo 'Rounded Up' City's Native Americans," *The Daily Beast*, July 21, 2016, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/lawsuit-racist-rodeo-rounded-up-citys-native-americans> [accessed 17 October 2017]

2 *Demarrias v. Dschaak*, Montana District Court, Great Falls Office, Case Number 4:2016cv00085, Filed July 11, 2016. <https://dockets.justia.com/docket/montana/mtdce/4:2016cv00085/52258> [accessed 17 October 2017]

3 Helen Longino, "Individuals or Populations?," in *Philosophy of Social Science: A New Introduction*, ed. Nancy Cartwright and Elenora Montuschi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 119.

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such implicit anti-black racism within emerging research on how certain *in-groups* and *out-groups* are neurologically coded along a continuum from fully human social beings to non-human objects of disgust and contempt. Citing the research of Harris and Fiske, Goff and colleagues observe that certain excluded out-groups might become so dehumanized by a given in-group that

> they may not even be encoded as social beings. When participants viewed targets from highly stigmatized social groups (e.g., homeless people and drug addicts) who elicit disgust, the region of the brain typically recruited for social perception (the medial prefrontal cortex) was not recruited. Those who are the least valued in the culture were not deemed worthy of social consideration on a neurological level.[4]

Using a "stereotype content model" (SCM) which predicts prejudices based on *perceived* moral violations and *individual* failings, Fiske and Harris build upon social psychological research on the phenomena of *infrahumanization*, "which demonstrates that dehumanized groups are believed not to experience complex human emotions or to share in-group beliefs."[5] Drawing on neuroscience research on the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) as an index of social cognition, Fiske and Harris tested the hypothesis of whether certain stereotyped groups (in particular the homeless) promote mPFC activation consistent with being recognized as fully human, social beings *or* whether they were recognized as being equivalent to *objects* of disgust and contempt. Fiske and Harris found that, "As hypothesized, members of some social groups seem to be dehumanized, at least as indicated by the absence of the typical neural signature for social cognition, as well as the exaggerated amygdala and insula reactions (consistent with disgust) and the disgust ratings they elicit."[6] The researchers conclude by suggesting that these findings are consistent with recent research on how stereotyped groups like the homeless elicit "neural patterns consistent with disgust (insula) and fear (amygdala)."[7]

These research outcomes, I want to argue, should be considered within the *colonial* knowledges that can be detected in the explicit and implicit ways in which we think about, perceive and represent crime, homelessness, and the bodies and populations which we associate with these social problems. As the

4 Phillip A. Goff et al., "Not Yet Human: Implicit Knowledge, Historical Dehumanization and Contemporary Consequences," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94, no. 2 (2008): 294.

5 Lasana T. Harris and Susan T. Fiske, "Dehumanizing the Lowest of the Low: Neuroimaging Responses to Extreme Out-Groups," *Psychological Science* 17, no. 10 (2006): 848.

6 Harris and Fiske, "Dehumanizing the Lowest of the Low," 852.

7 Ibid.

Wolf Point civil rights case illustrates, this implicit colonial gaze has direct and often violent consequences for populations who have already been subjected to settler colonialism, racial profiling and a history of vagrancy laws that continue the project of slavery and indentured servitude in the present.[8]

However, the implicit knowledges of a colonial outlook, far from being exclusive to the apparatus of state violence and police, continue to be constructed and perpetuated through the intellectual frameworks of the university: the social sciences, the health care and criminal justice system, and beyond. In this chapter, I argue that the conceptual mapping of our understanding of "homelessness" has been constructed on the basis of a system of racial and economic classification and coding that can be traced to the colonial encounters of the social sciences (*anthropology, sociology, urban ethnography*). The key feature of this racial and economic system of classification and coding I focus on is the way in which homeless and nomadic populations are perceived as inhabiting pre-modern modes of space, time, life, and labor. As a result, I argue that accounts of homelessness that fail to challenge the basic logic of the system of classification and coding that situates the homeless in this way will fall prey either to the criminalization/pathologization paradigm ("sin-talk" / "sick-talk"),[9] or will end up romanticizing and re-inscribing the marginalization and otherness of the poor ("difference talk")[10] in a way that complements neoliberal social policy. In the same way, a focus on economic and institutional causes of homelessness ("system-talk"), *without* challenging the logic of classification and coding of home/homelessness, will overlook the ways in which system-talk has been used to reinforce criminalization, pathologization, and marginalization of the poor as an exoticized Other. However, the fact remains that the first three ways of speaking about homelessness—sick talk, sin-talk, difference talk—each share a fundamental assumption that system-talk does not *necessarily*: the assumption that individuals are to be coded according to

8 William Bauer, Jr., *We Were All Like Migrant Workers Here: Work, Community and Memory on California's Round Valley Reservation, 1850–1941* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 33; see also Simon T. Cuthbert-Kerr, "Black Codes," in *The Jim Crow Encyclopedia*, Volume 1: A-J, ed. Nikki L.M. Brown and Barry M. Stentiford (London: Greenwood Press, 2008), 80.

9 Teresa Gowan characterizes "sin-talk" as talk of moral offense, "sick-talk" as that of pathology, and "system-talk" as that of systemic injustice. See Teresa Gowan, *Hobos, Hustlers and Backsliders: Homeless in San Francisco* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxi.

10 Here I characterize "difference" talk as talk that seeks to "…cultivate a cosmopolitan … openness to the Other based on acceptance of ethnocultural difference." See Bart van Leeuwen, "To the Edge of the Urban Landscape: Homelessness and the Politics of Care," *Political Theory*, published online January 23, 2017, DOI: 10.1177/0090591716682290, p. 3.

the divisions between *Home/Homeless*, *Settled/Nomadic, Modern/Pre-Modern*, *Civilized/Uncivilized.*

First, I frame the discussion of poverty and homelessness within decolonial theory. Once we dislodge our understanding of homelessness from the spatial, temporal, and anthropological assumptions of European modernity, we can see how the conceptual mapping of our understanding of the concept of poverty has been constructed within the *chronotopes* of modernity itself.[11] Eurocentric chronotopes of poverty have continued to structure how we understand poverty and homelessness in a way that obscures housing deprivation, economic oppression and dispossession. As I attempt to show, one way this obfuscation occurs can be seen in the way in which urban ethnographies that speak about the homeless tend to exoticize lower-class culture at the expense of sociopolitical and economic critiques of housing deprivation, oppression, and narratives of exiting homelessness. In addition, as Dussel notes, even the term deprivation suggests that poverty is a privation or lack while ignoring, downplaying, or failing to identify the causes of that lack, such as oppression, exploitation and domination. It is these ideological transformations of our modern understanding of poverty and homelessness that must be understood first, I argue, so that we may begin to take a critical distance from the Eurocentric chronotopes within which discussions of homelessness tend to be mapped in contemporary philosophical thought. Taking these observations into account, we can appreciate the claim that the neoliberal management of homelessness is in this sense linked to the implicit knowledges of a colonial project.

The implicitly colonial project of managing the homeless is, however, at the same time a neoliberal one. Since the system of racial and economic classification and coding which structures the modern mapping of home/homelessness is so engrained within the concrete, often violent economic-political structures of the West, a decolonization of our understanding of homelessness cannot simply consist in a valorization or romanticization of the opposite side of the home/homelessness binary: the risk-taking urban nomad investing in survival strategies of homeless culture. That is, attempts to valorize the self-sufficiency and independence of homeless culture as exterior or foreign to Euro-American political thought and culture must face the charge of exoticizing and romanticizing homelessness by downplaying systemic inequality and ignoring narratives of struggle, resistance and exiting homelessness. Decolonizing our

11 *Chronotopology* is defined as "the study of the ways in which both space and time are produced." See Eduardo Mendieta, "Chronotopology: Critique of Spatiotemporal Regimes," in *New Critical Theory: Essays on Liberation,* ed. William S. Wilkerson and Jeffrey Paris (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 192.

understanding of homelessness, I argue, begins by rejecting representations of the homeless as the *passive poor,* independent urban noble savages, or survivor-entrepreneurs of *poverty-as-lack*, and instead embracing (following Dussel) a materialist understanding of *poverty-as-oppression.* Understanding what I call *the coloniality of homelessness* entails the rejection of both sides of the home/homelessness binary, since we wish to valorize neither the *Aryan/Home* nor the *Nomadic/Homeless,* but rather the material and cultural liberation of the poor that would lead to the dissolution of the logic which separates and links these figures in a relation of domination, oppression and exploitation. As the preliminary example of the Wolf Point civil rights case illustrates, understanding the coloniality of homelessness consists in seeing through the discourse and ideology of the homeless to the racial and economic logics that make it possible for some populations to be subjected and subordinated to others.

2 The Coloniality of Labor

One of the basic insights of decolonial thought is that concepts of political economy (e.g., poverty, famine, vagrancy) were constructed on the basis of Eurocentric racial distinctions between modern/pre-modern, and civilized/uncivilized forms of life, labor, and exchange. Thus, Quijano introduces the notion of the *coloniality of labor* to designate the forms of labor relegated to specific racial groups along a hierarchy of value. This colonial system of value attribution with respect to labor was strategically racial in nature:

> The racist distribution of new social identities was combined, as had been done so successfully in Anglo-America, with a racist distribution of labor and the forms of exploitation of colonial capitalism. This was, above all, through a quasi-exclusive association of whiteness with wages and, of course, with the high-order positions in the colonial administration. Thus each form of labor control was associated with a particular race. Consequently, the control of a specific form of labor could be, at the same time, the control of a specific group of dominated people. A new technology of domination/exploitation, in this case race/labor, was articulated in such a way that the two elements appeared naturally associated.[12]

12 Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 537.

From the perspective of European colonists in America, native populations were seen not so much as victims of rightful conquest so much as subjects of a hegemonic economic system that demanded agricultural and manual laborers:

> The fact is that from the very beginning of the colonization of America, Europeans associated nonpaid or nonwaged labor with the dominated races because they were "inferior" races. The vast genocide of the Indians in the first decades of colonization was not caused principally by the violence of the conquest nor by the plagues the conquistadors brought, but took place because so many American Indians were used as disposable manual labor and forced to work until death.[13]

As a result, Eurocentrism in the Americas was built upon two founding myths: "…first, the idea of the history of human civilization as a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe; second, a view of the differences between Europe and non-Europe as natural(racial) differences and not consequences of a history of power."[14] The consequences of the imposition of this Eurocentrist political economy were two-fold:

> peoples were dispossessed of their own and singular historical identities. The second is perhaps less obvious, but no less decisive: their new racial identity, colonial and negative, involved the plundering of their place in the history of the cultural production of humanity. From then on, there were inferior races, capable only of producing inferior cultures. The new identity also involved their relocation in the historical time constituted with America first and with Europe later: from then on they were the past. In other words, the model of power based on coloniality also involved a cognitive model, a new perspective of knowledge within which non-Europe was the past, and because of that inferior, if not always primitive.[15]

This colonial Eurocentic model of labor was developed into an international theory of vagrancy in de Vattel's *The Law of Nations* (1758), where we are told that while conquest should be considered an illegal and illegitimate means of land acquisition for nations seeking to expand, an *acquired settlement* established in a territory inhabited by vagrants is a just and legal means of acquisition. For de

13 Ibid., 538.
14 Ibid., 542.
15 Ibid., 552.

Vattel, a simple "habitation" lacking express declaration of title and intent is distinguished from a "settlement" which is defined as "a fixed residence in any place with an intention of always staying there … by an express declaration."[16] Therefore, since "(V)agrants are people who have no settlement," Vattell concludes that, "The people of Europe, too closely pent up at home, finding land of which the savages stood in no particular need, and of which they made no actual and constant use, were lawfully entitled to take possession of it, and settle it with colonies."[17] Because for de Vattel primitive modes of subsistence hunting and fishing are insufficient in light of the multiplying of population, in the modern age of cultivation it is therefore a law of nature for all nations to cultivate the land and soil. Consequently, the pre-modern age of "wandering tribes of men" give way to the modern age of industry which marks "the origin of the rights of property and dominion."[18]

As Anghie and Gilbert have observed, de Vattel's distinction between colonial State sovereignty and nomadic, wandering tribes "marks one of the central tenets of the international legal framework that was gradually imposed on the rest of the world."[19] The consequence of these fundamental distinctions between colonial sovereignty and nomadic races, Anghie notes, appears in Locke's elaboration of property and ultimately leads to the idea that dispossession is both legitimate and natural destiny for nomadic populations who lack a fixed settlement.[20] It is for this reason that Christopher Columbus characterized the indigenous population of the Americas as "a people, warlike and numerous, and with customs and beliefs very different from ours, a people, living in highlands and mountains, having no settled dwellings."[21]

3 Colonial Encounters

As historians and practitioners of ethnography have noted, the disciplines of anthropology and ethnography were central to the development of the

16 Emer de Vattel, *The Law of Nations, or the Principles of the Law of Nature, Applied to the Conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns* (London: Paternoster-Row, 1797), 103.

17 de Vattel, *The Law of Nations,* 100

18 Ibid., 98.

19 Jeremie Gilbert, *Nomadic Peoples and Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 61.

20 Antony Anghie, "Vattel, Internal Colonialism, and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," in *Freedom and Democracy in an Imperial Context: Dialogues with James Tully,* ed. Robert Nichols and Jakeet Singh (New York: Routledge, 2010), 91.

21 Christopher Columbus, "Letter of Columbus to the Nurse," in *Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus: Including those contained in R.H. Major's Select Letter of Christopher Columbus, Volume II* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 66.

colonial structure of the New World. Indeed, as Whiteley has it, "(E)thnography in the New World is coterminous with Europeans in the New World; ethnography is a deeply *cultural* and politically *structural* matter, that goes back in one way or another to Columbus."[22] In the Americas, representations of indigenous populations as noble savages in what Sayre calls "exploration-ethnographies" went hand in hand in the dispossession and subjugation of those populations within the legal framework of colonial authorities. Prefiguring the professionalization of ethnography as an academic discipline at the end of the nineteenth century, exploration-ethnographies of indigenous populations "organized partial knowledge so as to make it appear complete, and to enable colonials to impose a sense of order and control over the land and the Indians."[23] In this way, colonial ethnography and its study of nomadic races positioned itself as the objective pursuit of knowledge which at the same time "rested uncomfortably upon a degree of obliviousness by its practitioners to the often dire circumstances of its subjects."[24]

Most importantly, the colonial encounters of early ethnography situated the objectivity of their writings and observations within a Eurocentric imaginary that viewed indigenous populations as primitive, pre-modern, or degenerate forms of European civilization and culture. In particular, the ambivalent, dual imagery of the noble savage, as Whiteley observes, was a projection of the deficiencies white Europeans perceived from their own standpoint as "as the apex of human progress."[25] In this way, colonial ethnography solidified European notions of sovereignty, dominion and superiority over the nomadic vagrants who were objectified as pre-modern, primitive, and inferior. As Christopher Herbert writes of the colonial ethnographic imagination of the nineteenth century, "observation and understanding are merely preliminaries to the imposition of tangible power upon the natives."[26] Conceived as the study of cultures of nomadic races of uncivilized populations, ethnology too would become a central tool for the scientific organization of colonial intelligence.[27] In

22 Peter Whiteley, "Ethnography," in *A Companion to the Anthropology of American Indians*, ed. Thomas Biolsi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 436.

23 Gordon M. Sayre, *Les Sauvages Americains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 79.

24 Whiteley, "Ethnography," 436.

25 Ibid., 438.

26 Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 165.

27 Peter Pels, "The Rise and Fall of the Indian Aborigines: Orientalism, Anglicism, and the Emergence of an Ethnology of India, 1833–1869," in *Colonial Subjects: Essays on the Practical History of Anthropology*, ed. Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 85.

Prichard's *History of Mankind* (1836), a kind of cultural anthropology of nations is joined up with a physical anthropology of settled and nomadic races:

> The most civilised races, those who live by agriculture and the arts of cultivated life, all the most intellectually improved nations of Europe and Asia, have a shape of the head which differs from both the forms above mentioned. The characteristic form of the skull among these nations may be termed oval, or elliptical … (A) second shape of the head, very different from the last mentioned, belongs principally to the nomadic races, who wander with their herds and flocks over vast plains, and to the tribes who creep along the shores of the Icy Sea, and live partly by fishing, and in part on the flesh of their reindeer. These nations have broad and lozenge-formed faces, and what I have termed pyramidal skulls.[28]

By examining the skulls of the nomadic wandering tribes versus those of the settled, civilized nations, colonial ethnology would stake out claims of objectivity even before the professionalization of ethnology as an academic discipline. From these methods, Prichard concludes, "(N)ature has availed herself, at the same time, of this angle to mark out the diversities of the animal kingdom, and to establish a sort of scale from the inferior tribes up to the most beautiful forms which are found in the human species."[29]

Prichard's anthropology would be taken up and applied to the culture of the urban poor in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). Presented as an ethnography of the street-folk, Mayhew begins by stating that

> Of the thousand millions of human beings that are said to constitute the population of the entire globe, there are—socially, morally, and perhaps even physically considered—but two distinct and broadly marked races, viz., the wanderers and the settlers—the vagabond and the citizen—the nomadic and the civilized tribes.[30]

Furthermore, Mayhew writes that within each settled or civilized tribe, there exists "some wandering horde intermingled with, and in a measure preying

28 James Cowles Prichard, *The Natural History of Man: Comprising Inquiries into the Modifying Influence of Physical and Moral Agencies on the Different Tribes of the Human Family*, ed. Edwin Norris (London: H. Bailliere, 1855), 100.

29 Prichard, *The Natural History of Man*, 104.

30 Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work, Vol. 1* (London: George Woodfall and Son, 1851), 1.

upon it."[31] In what follows, Mayhew documents not only the peculiar physiology of urban nomads, but the detailed language, habits, morals, instincts, desires, and aversions that constitute the culture of urban nomads. The nomad, Mayhew states, can be distinguished from the settled or civilized man by: his aversion to regular labor and employment, his lack of future-oriented thinking, his "inability to perceive consequences ever so slightly removed from immediate apprehension," his desire for intoxicants, his ability to endure privation, his insensibility to pain, a love of gaming, frequent risk-taking, his "libidinous" desires, cruel nature, his delight in fighting and vengeance, his lack of notions of property, the absence of chastity in the women, and his "rude" idea of the divine.[32] Despite the diversity of all the categories of various street-folk, Mayhew writes that within all varieties, there is found "a greater development of the animal than of the intellectual or moral nature of man."[33]

As Christopher Herbert observes, Mayhew's ethnography of urban nomads departs in significant ways from Prichard's anthropological methods by marking out "its special ethnographic territory by fixing rigorously upon existence lived below the apparent threshold of 'desire.'"[34] As Herbert observes, Mayhew focuses on how the poverty and privation experienced by urban nomads is so culturally engrained in them "that meaningful social experience seems virtually denied to them."[35] In this way, Mayhew utilizes the colonial imagination of vagrancy and nomadic races to understand the proliferating classes of urban poor created by the industrial revolution, who are viewed precisely in the same way as primitive, animal-like races studied by colonial ethnographers and anthropologists.

As social sciences came to be professionalized as academic disciplines in the university near the end of the nineteenth century, however, the colonial linkages of anthropology and ethnography to the nation-state only seemed to strengthen. Not only did the ambivalent, dual imagery of the noble savage remain a central trope, but anthropological studies "enabled settlers to lay a legitimate claim to the land (Yanagisako 2005), and was party to the denial of American Indian coevalness (Fabian 1983)."[36] As Eduardo Mendieta observes, Eurocentric representations of space and time—chronotopes of modernity—were validated through the scientific reorganization of the disciplines of

31 Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1.
32 Ibid., 2.
33 Ibid., 3.
34 Herbert, *Culture and Anomie,* 214.
35 Ibid.
36 Lee Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture* (London: Duke University Press, 2010), 13.

anthropology and the social sciences in the university during the nineteenth century.[37] From the moment of professionalization, anthropology and ethnography became a codified scientific endeavor to study Western/non-Western and civilized/noncivilized peoples, where Europe and the Americas constituted the standard and apex of progress and civility. However, questions regarding the *nature*, *causes* and *origins* of nomadism and vagrancy would become highly contested within ethnographic and anthropological circles throughout the nineteenth into the twentieth century.

As De Gobineau's theory of degeneracy in *The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of the Races* (1856)[38] began to be supplanted by both Darwinian theories of evolution and fitness and Lamarckian views on heredity, evolutionary notions of social dysfunction started to be mapped on more closely to problems of crime, vagrancy, sanitation, reproduction, and mental hygiene. By the close of the nineteenth century, colonial notions of vagrancy and nomadism begin to merge even more closely in medical and sanitary journals linked to the development of State departments of health, sanitation, and police. In an 1885 address to the Association of Sanitary Inspectors titled "Homeless and Nomadic Populations: Their Sanitary Conditions and Inspection," B.W. Richardson distinguishes three classes of homeless people: "(i) vagrants, (ii) 'Itinerant salesmen', and (iii) 'pure Nomads, like the Gipsies [sic]."[39] Richardson writes that, "(T)hese homeless and nomadic populations are so distinctive, it is important for us, as sanitarians, to know what extent they differ from the rest of the community in the matters of health and longevity."[40] Despite the differences in circumstance of the three classes of homeless persons, Richardson concludes that the reason why the evil problems of health and sanitation still plague civilization is that, in each class of the homeless, "the wandering nomad" does not acquire the rules of civilization.[41]

With the emergence of hereditarian views about human behavior, a main point of contention that would haunt discussions in anthropology and ethnography—from Malinowski and Brinton to Boas—was the source, cause,

37 Mendieta, "Chronotopology: Critique of Spatiotemporal Regimes,"175–200.

38 A. de Gobineau, *The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races, with Particular Reference to Their Respective Influence in the Civil and Political History of Mankind* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1856), 217.

39 B.W. Richardson, "Homeless and Nomadic Populations: Their Sanitary Conditions and Inspection," in *The Asclepiad: A Book of Original Research and Observation in the Science, Art and Literature of Medicine, Preventative and Curative* (London: Paternoster-Row, 1883), 204.

40 Richardson, "Homeless and Nomadic Populations," 205.

41 Ibid., 219.

and origin of vagrancy and the wandering habits of nomadic races. Was the cause of nomadism and a wandering lifestyle to be attributed to heredity, physiology, neurology, climate, geography, habits, or culture? Perhaps a combination of all of these? In his *Races and Peoples: Lectures on the Science of Ethnography* (1890), Daniel Brinton offered the following account:

> Ethnography, indeed, is the necessary basis of correct history and sound statesmanship. It offers to history a foundation on natural law; it explains events by showing their dependent on the physical structure, the mental peculiarities, and the geographic surroundings of the peoples engaged in them; it presents, in its present pictures of savage life, the conditions of the highest nations in their earlier stages of their culture.[42]

For Brinton, ethnography drew upon physiological, psychological, linguistic, climatic, and geographic explanations in its account of how savage cultures represent earlier stages of the clearly superior, white race.[43] One of the purest forms of the white race, for Brinton was the "Aryan" race.[44] When it came to the "nomadic hoardes" of inferior cultures (e.g., Gypsies), Brinton thought that these forms of vagrancy were due to mainly hereditary causes.[45] For Brinton, these insights made ethnography a science directly useful for the statesman, since "to the statesman it offers those facts about the capacities and limitations of peoples which should guide his dealings with them," so long as

> each people, each race, must be studied by itself, free from bias, free from bigotry, and with the conviction that no matter what metaphysics says, any nation, as any man, may lift himself by the recognition of those indefeasible and universal elements of the mind: the "I," the "ought," and the "can"–the reverence of self, the respect for duty, and the devotion to freedom.[46]

Thus for Brinton, while clearly nomadic races of vagrants were inferior, Brinton still maintained that any man may lift himself by reliance upon himself. This fusion of cultural essentialism and an ideology of individualism and

42 Daniel Brinton, *Races and Peoples: Lectures on the Science of Ethnography* (New York: N.D.C. Hodges, 1890), 300.
43 Brinton, *Races and Peoples*, 110–111.
44 Ibid., 111.
45 Ibid., 75.
46 Ibid., 300.

self-help would be crucial for understanding the development of liberal views about the lower-class in the twentieth century.

The white supremacy inherent in Brinton's ethnography of nomadic races would also constitute a stubbornly consistent theme within discourses of vagrancy and nomadism at the turn of the twentieth century. Educational books were published in the United States on "The Aryan Race"[47] that directly linked the supremacy of the Aryan race over Semites, Mongolians and Negroes to the rejection of nomadic, pastoral lifestyles in favor of agricultural settlements.[48] Around the same time, U.S. Census Reports began documenting as separate categories or schedules the estimates of "defective, dependent and delinquent" individuals. Within early U.S. Census Reports on dependents these schedules included separate categories for homeless persons. In one U.S. Census Report from 1880, the report states that

> It is a well-ascertained fact that, in the operation of that mysterious but potent factor in the production of defective types of humanity which we call heredity, insanity in an ancestor may become idiocy or crime in a descendant, and vice versa. There is a morphology of evil which requires to be studied. How far it may extend, or what may be its ramifications, no one can yet say. All of these forms of misfortune are often a cause of pauperization of individuals and of entire families.[49]

By the turn of the century, some British writers were prepared to equate the homeless, nomadic races with parasites and diseases of civilization, and "the Home" as the patriarchal foundation for the progress of humanity and civilization:

> It is with the home that civilization began, and it is to the home that it permanently attaches. Nomadic races are incapable of rising high in the scale of humanity.... The effect of homelessness upon the moral being is something like what the cessation of atmospheric pressure might be upon the physical frame. The power of self-restraint goes. The fear of punishment is all that remains of the ethical constitution built up by centuries of progressive civilisation. Such cases show how easily humanity

47 Charles Morris, *The Aryan Race: Its Origins and Its Achievements* (Chicago: S.C. Griggs and Company, 1888).

48 Morris, *The Aryan Race*, 49.

49 Frederick Howard Wines, *Report on the Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes of the Population of the United States as Returned at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), X.

> may revert to squalid barbarism, if the foundation of its ascent is disturbed. This foundation is Home, a settled abode susceptible of continuous improvement by the exertion of the same faculties which in their wider exercise maintain that continuous improvement of the State without which its continued existence is impossible.[50]

Late nineteenth-century anxiety over an emerging dangerous class of degenerates, deficients, dependents, vagrants and nomads—both across Europe and the United States—turned upon the close linkage between bourgeois fears of the *dirty* and *dangerous* lower-class criminal element and colonial assertions of Euro-American sovereignty, racial supremacy and social order. In this way, homelessness began to be viewed not only as a form of pre-modern nomadism but also as a form of *degeneracy* in its own right whose existence might be caught up in the body politic itself. Speaking of the degenerate homelessness of nomadic races, one observer writes at the turn of the twentieth century that

> What we are threatened with is then something of the nature of *Tabes dorsalis*, degeneration of the spinal marrow, the beginning of general national paralysis. The health of the entire body politic is bound up with that of the peasantry. Is that health safe-guarded or is it left to the haphazard operation of laws to which the well-being of a parasitic microbe is of exactly as much importance as that of the entire organism on which it feeds?[51]

In this way, homeless dependents began to be linked to theories of heredity that attributed homelessness to the traits of pre-modern nomadic races. The wandering impulse of vagrants, vagabonds, and transients thus became an obsession for social scientists, academics, and politicians interested in solving this social problem from a scientific point of view.

The linkage of hereditarian, anthropological theories of nomadic races to the social problem of vagrancy and homelessness, therefore, lay the groundwork for the birth of the American eugenics movement, led by Charles Davenport. In 1915, Davenport published an article on "The Feebly Inhibited: Nomadism or the Wandering Impulse, with Special Reference to Heredity," which

50 D.C. Pedder, "Without House or Home," in *The Contemporary Reader*, Volume LXXXI, January-June (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1902), 846–847.

51 D.C. Pedder, "Without House or Home," 847.

argued that nomadism was a heritable racial trait.[52] Thus while Welshman argues that Lamarckian hereditary views about an unemployable, dependent class largely disappeared after 1900 with the rise of full employment discourse of the First World War, we see that the Eugenics Societies developed in the 1920s and 1930s seized upon earlier views about the degeneracy of the homeless and vagrants. In 1920, the *Journal of Social Hygiene* published a full text for a Model State Law on Sterilization, which stated that by enacting such a law "the race will be purged of some of its degenerate and defective stock."[53] One of the targeted classes stated in the statute is the "socially inadequate classes, regardless of etiology or prognosis," which included

> (1) Feeble-minded; (2) insane (including the psychopathic); (3) criminalistics (including the delinquent and wayward); (4) epileptic; (5) inebriate; (6) diseased (including drug-habitues, the tuberculous, the syphalytic, the leprous, and others with chronic infectious and legally segregable diseases); (7) blind (including those with seriously impariend vision); (8) deaf (including those with seriously impariend hearing); (9) deformed (including the crippled); and (10) dependent (including orphans, ne'er-do-wells, the homeless, tramps, and paupers.)[54]

By 1920, concerns about Aryan supremacy over nomadic races had morphed into concerns over the degenerate and defective stock of homeless families, exemplified by the *Kallikak* study of 1912. However, as Pittenger has shown, the revival of hereditary essentialism propounded by the American Eugenics movement would give way to a kind of *cultural essentialism* that, while latent in earlier ethnographies, would be in many ways perpetuated throughout the twentieth century even by Progressives, academics, and urban anthropologists alike.[55] Indeed, the ambivalence as to whether hobos chose their own cultural nomadic lifestyle, for example, can be seen in Nels Anderson's 1921 study of the hobo that characterized the disease, disability, and unsanitary conditions of the hobo as "the natural and inevitable consequences of the

52 C.B. Davenport, "The Feebly Inhibited: Nomadism or the Wandering Impulse, with Special Reference to Heredity," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 1, no. 2 (1915): 120–122.

53 Harry H. Laughlin, "Eugenic Sterilization in the United States," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 6, no. 4 (New York: The American Social Hygiene Association, 1920): 517.

54 Harry H. Laughlin, "Eugenic Sterilization in the United States," 521.

55 Mark Pittinger, *Class Unknown: Undercover Investigations of American Work and Poverty from the Progressive Era to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 90–93.

migratory risk-taking and irregular life of the homeless man."[56] In this way, early notions of homeless culture would begin to develop as a substitute for racial and evolutionary concepts of homeless and nomadic races, while at the same time serving as the basis for the colonial encounters of urban ethnography that were to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s.

4 The Colonial Encounters of Urban Ethnography

Following Franz Boas' rejection of hereditary and evolutionary approaches to culture,[57] Paul Radin's 1927 *Primitive Man as Philosopher* attempted to distance anthropology and ethnography from the cultural essentialism and imperialism of their predecessors as well. For Radin, anthropology contributed to the *romanticization* of primitive peoples as noble savages in the wake of European colonization, as well as to the *racism* of evolutionary, physical anthropological approaches emphasizing the civilized habits and mentalities of superior Aryan races over inferior nomadic ones. For Radin, the romanticization and racialization of primitive cultures were two sides of the same coin as far as ethnologists should be concerned, since both relied upon a the failure of "the scientifically accredited theories of the innate inferiority of primitive man in mentality and capacity for civilization quite as much as to prejudice and bias."[58] Thus Radin sought to distance ethnography and anthropology from evolutionary and racial claims about the inferiority, degeneracy or radical difference of primitive cultures from Western, European intellectuals.

However, as Pittinger shows, even when ethnography openly rejected hereditary and evolutionary approaches, the concept of culture often served as a substitute concept which did the same epistemological work that race, class, or even hereditary had carried out before. The ambivalence of culture left open the possibility for the development of a kind of cultural essentialism to develop in sociology, criminology, and urban ethnography throughout the periodic obsessions of the twentieth century with lower-class culture, the underclass, and the mentally ill homeless. What I want to argue, following Pittenger, is that to the extent that accounts of homelessness, lower-class culture, or the underclass do not challenge the basic categories of *Western/non-Western, Modern/*

56 Anderson, quoted in John Welshman, *Underclass: A History of the Excluded Since 1880* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 61.

57 Regna Darnell, "Mind, Body, and the Native Point of View: Boasian Theory at the Centennial of *The Mind of Primitive Man*," in *The Franz Boas Papers, Vol. 1.*, ed. Regna Darnell, Michelle Hamilton, Robert L.A. Hancock, and Joshua Smith (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 10.

58 Paul Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (New York: New York Review Books, 2017), xxii.

pre-Modern and *Civilized/Uncivilized,* conceptions of an exoticized otherness' are reproduced by the simple substitution of heredity with culture. Furthermore, to the extent these basic categories of Eurocentrism remained unchallenged, such accounts of homelessness remain vulnerable to a kind of economic imperialism that fails to challenge socio-economic structures of oppression and dispossession, and show a tendency to ignore narratives of resistance to, challenging, or struggling to exit homelessness. For political theorists, the exoticization of homeless culture and urban nomads has the effect of suggesting that, despite the rise of neoliberal economics and collapse of the welfare State, the noble savages of the post-industrial city (i.e., the homeless) are self-sufficient survivor-entrepreneurs that are content and able to take care of themselves. In other words, accounts of homelessness and homeless culture which omit narratives of struggle, resistance or exiting simultaneously validate both the cultural distinctiveness of the homeless while also validating the economic-political status quo of neoliberal social policy. That is, even accounts of homelessness which incorporate system-talk—talk about systemic injustice—remain vulnerable to a colonial imaginary to the extent that the homeless are portrayed as a category of others who exhibit primitive behaviors and habits of culture, survival, and risk.

Urban ethnography, from the moment of its professionalization, began methodologically from the same basic Eurocentric premises found in colonial exploration-ethnographies to inform their objects of study. As Julie Scott Jones writes, the advent of urban ethnography

> mimicked the anthropological tradition in its exoticization of urban "others": while anthropologists focused on colonial non-European "others," the Chicago sociologists typically focused on those in the lower reaches of western urban society, such as immigrants, the working class, vagrants, and so forth.... Again, we have relatively affluent, male, upper middle-class (and white) fieldworkers researching "others" without reference to issues of power or ethics (let alone gender, race, or class).[59]

Although by the 1940s concerns had shifted from the hereditary or evolutionary degeneracy of homeless families to the behavior and culture of hobos, tramps, and the lower-class, James Spradley and Walter Miller's studies of the delinquency and lower-class culture of urban nomads explicitly traced their methodological origins to the anthropological study of primitive, non-European

59 Julie Scott Jones, "Origins and Ancestors: A Brief History of Ethnography," in *Ethnography in Social Science Practice*, ed. Julie Scott Jones and Sal Watt (New York: Routledge, 2010), 21.

peoples. Indeed, as the preface to Spradley's *You Owe Yourself a Drunk* reminds us, anthropology began

> as the study of foreign peoples, including the indigenous populations of North America, who had been encountered by the imperial expansion of European society. Anthropology, in short, came into being with a colonial mission to study conquered peoples dispersed around the globe … it is undeniably true that anthropology began in the West with the explicit goal of understanding the rest (i.e., non-European peoples).[60]

As a result, Spradley writes,

> ethnographic study of social identity has a long history in anthropology, particularly in the study of kinship systems. In many non-Western societies … behavior patterns which first appeared strange and exotic became comprehensible only after the anthropologist had mapped the native definitions of such social identity systems. Once the underlying cultural rules for classifying and relating to kinsmen are discovered for a society, other patterns within the culture begin to emerge.[61]

Since for Spradley, urban nomads had qualitatively different temporal experiences than normal Americans, urban nomads were separated from the rest of humanity not by spatial or hereditary distance, but by temporal and cultural distance: "(T)he distance between most Americans and urban nomads cannot be measured in miles; they are separated from us by *cultural distance* … They are socially alienated and culturally separated from us but still they are in our very midst!"[62] Thus, for Spradley, the job of the urban ethnographer is to enter into the "natural laboratory" of the city just as anthropologists entered into the primitive societies of indigenous populations:

> Anthropologists have a unique contribution to make to such urban studies. Their research has been carried out in small, often remote, natural laboratories and has resulted in a unique appreciation for cultural differences. It has also led to the formulation of methods which are especially suited to the discovery of the way in which *insiders* view their experience.

60 James P. Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Urban Ethnography of Urban Nomads*, with a new introduction by Merrill Singer (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2000), xxiii–xxiv.
61 Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk,* 69.
62 Ibid., 6.

> As anthropologists turn their attention to urban subcultures they are bringing with them a guiding principle, gained by studying hundreds of so-called 'primitive' societies: *discover the native point of view*.[63]

While emphasis in urban ethnography clearly focused on the *cultural* peculiarity of the lower-class, certain racial and colonial assumptions about the nature of poor families, gangs, and individuals remained. Walter Miller's portrayal of the lower-class held that the poor covertly desired coercion and dependence, and were prone to risk-taking and sexual adventure. For Miller, lower class subculture was characterized by "an underlying desire to seek restrictive environments, such as jails, prisons, and mental hospitals, on which one can be dependent."[64] According to Miller, knowledge of the national origin of the lower-class (which includes race and ethnicity) could be gained from physical characteristics as well as observed behavior, which together indicated an individual's *parent society*. In this way, the behavior of lower-class individuals indicated, for Miller, what race one belonged to and, consequently, to what parent society one belonged (i.e., Africa). Miller's anthropological method, as well as his characterization of the lower-class as covertly desiring coercion, would directly influence James Spradley's 1970 urban ethnography, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads.*

In Spradley's ethnography of urban nomads, we discover in the notes that, as Spradley recounts, "(T)he term 'urban nomads' was first suggested to me by Walter B. Miller,"[65] and that the term was chosen over migrants and tramps for its wider application. In his ethnography of how the urban nomad gains a distinct temporal and cultural identity, Spradley writes of the urban nomad that "(P)assivity, in a sense, becomes part of his essential character, an automatic response, one which he no longer has to continuously control."[66] Prefiguring contemporary acculturation theories of homeless, Spradley maps out the native definitions of the strange and exotic[67] temporalities and identities which urban nomads learn to adopt as their essential character.[68] By charting the cognitive maps that give urban nomads peculiar temporalities and identities,[69] Spradley details the way in which the cognitive structures of urban nomads

63 Ibid., 6.
64 Stuart Palmer and John A. Humphrey, *Deviant Behavior: Patterns, Sources, and Control* (New York: Springer, 1990), 44.
65 Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk*, 264, n. 3.
66 Ibid., .3.
67 Ibid., 69.
68 Ibid., 3.
69 Ibid., 265.

separate them in a cultural world apart from normal society. Near the end of the book, Spradley acknowledges that there is truth to Miller's assertion that urban nomads "seem to seek self-punishment by their patterns of living,"[70] but that this is too simple a characterization for the culture of tramps. Spradley then quotes an informant, a Seattle police chief, who says of urban nomads that, "We do know that there must be a better way to handle them and we do know that these people are not criminals in the sense of having deliberately selected a different than normal way of living."[71]

Spradley then approvingly endorses the portrayal of the deliberately selected life styles of urban nomads by the police chief, stating that

> If urban institutions are to serve a multicultural constituency we must all have a deeper understanding and commitment to the American value of *freedom*. Can we create a society which will recognize the dignity of diverse culture-patterns; and one which allows people the freedom to live by these cultures? Urban nomads are but one category of men for whom this questions is relevant.[72]

For Spradley, urban nomads "need freedom rather than assistance,"[73] since most urban nomads live such a life style by choice and have "rejected middle-class norms and values."[74] Thus for Spradley, the phenomena of urban nomads is one of deliberate choice and not one of welfare and assistance. Consequently, Spradley writes that the world and culture of the tramp becomes "a viable alternative to other ways of life."[75] Since the culture and lifestyle of an urban nomad is a deliberate choice that one becomes acculturated into, there is no need for the system-talk of welfare and assistance, but rather an acceptance of the Other and respect for his choice to live differently (difference-talk).

Much like Miller's behavioral account of lower-class culture, Oscar Lewis' culture of poverty arguments were based on ethnographic accounts that mirrored Chicago school sociologists that emphasized the cultural and psychological traits of the urban poor in the natural habitat of the city. Similar to Miller, Lewis characterized the traits of the urban poor as essentially passive,

70 Ibid., 58.
71 Ibid., 259.
72 Ibid., 259.
73 Ibid., 260.
74 Ibid., 262.
75 Ibid., 257.

embodying traits such as fatalism, rootlessness, criminality, and traditionality.[76] Patrick Moynihan's report on "The Negro Family," which was heavily influenced by Oscar Lewis' culture of poverty arguments of the 1960s, blamed the economic situation of black communities on the welfare dependency of black families which in turn was due to the pathologies of the black family, black youth and black social organization. In this way, Miller, Spradley, Lewis, and Moynihan contributed to a picture of the passive poor[77] who not only accepted their fate within the rough and tumble environment of urban life, but were culturally or covertly tied to their identities as lower-class. In this way, accounts of homeless culture evacuated any conception that there was and could be an urban politics of struggle, resistance, and narratives of exiting homelessness. These views regarding lower-class culture and behavior, while not hereditary or evolutionary, nonetheless retained colonial views about the essential character of poor, primitive-like communities in their natural habitat. Indeed, much like the exploration-ethnographies of early Euro-American colonists, urban ethnography took the native point of view as a way to understand and explicate the essential otherness of the poor which, although cultural, was nevertheless resistant to narratives of struggle, resistance, or system-talk that emphasizes economic-political structures of oppression and dispossession.

As Bayat explains, a more critical urban ethnography emerged in the wake of homeless culture arguments of the 1960s and 1970s, notably in the work of Perlman and Castells.[78] Starting with social movements such as the urban territorial movement, Bayat shows how the colonial encounters of homeless culture arguments were undermined by more critical sociology and ethnographies of urban marginality. Nonetheless, homeless culture arguments couched in the language of choice persisted. Mary Madden's critique of more recent work in urban ethnography demonstrates the persistence of the colonial encounters of urban ethnography until very recently. In Madden's criticism of Glasser and Bridgman's 1999 anthropological study, *Braving the Street,* Madden observes how researchers, influenced by Spradley, reproduce the notion of the nomad and the street within "familiar modern and postmodern connotations of the street as a 'risky' place" that they actually compare to "classical anthropological studies of small-scale agricultural or pastoral societies."[79] Madden

76 Asef Bayat, "Globalization and the Politics of the Informals in the Global South," in *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia,* ed. Ananya Roy and Nezar AlSayyad (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 83–84.

77 Bayat, "Globalization," 83–84.

78 Ibid., 83–86.

79 Mary Madden, "Braving Homelessness on the Ethnographic Street with Irene Glasser and Rae Bridgman," p. 11, <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/84275/2/> (accessed October 17, 2017).

notices how researchers tend to describe the survival strategies of homeless urban nomads by reference to "Darwinian connotations of 'adaptation' and in terms of an ethnographic machismo, 'the street' can be seen as a microcosm of the urban 'jungle,' a site in which to develop 'street-smarts' because survival of the fittest is the aim of the free market game."[80]

Perhaps most importantly, Madden observes the tendency of researchers to describe the homeless as a kind of pre-modern, nomadic culture in the post-modern habitat of the city. According to Madden, the danger consists in representing the homeless subject as

> a product of urban [post]modernity yet has an out-of-time quality and is associated with the pre-modern … homeless subject is linguistically associated with the a-historical agricultural or pastoral societies of the "nomad" and their "culture" produced as primitive adaptation to modernity. The anthropologically animated nomad-ridden street has become the means and site of civilisation.[81]

Whether or not these criticism apply to Glasser and Bridgman's holistic ethnography is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, Madden's elaboration of the problem of the colonial encounters of urban ethnography is extremely useful in making sense of recent developments in ethnography, acculturation theory, and philosophical defenses of homelessness during the neoliberal period.

5 Neoliberal (Colonial) Encounters

Ravenhill's 1991 ethnography, *The Culture of Homelessness,* documents what it refers to as the dependency culture that was allegedly identified in the 1980s. Ravenhill defines "dependency culture" as "the permanently unemployed who start families having never worked. They are dependent on the State for housing and other benefit payments."[82] Without mentioning decades of socio-economic changes including informalization of work, privatization and roll-back of the welfare state, Ravenhill situates the discovery of dependency culture within the narrative of the welfare state:

80 Madden, "Braving Homelessness," 11.
81 Ibid., 14.
82 Megan Ravenhill, *The Culture of Homelessness* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 60.

> The welfare state was designed to provide for everyone and to create a safety net for the deserving poor and those who became temporarily unemployed or ill and could not work.... However, by the time a couple of generations had passed and unemployment began to rise, increasing numbers of people became dependent on the State. By the 1980s, a 'culture of dependency' was identified.[83]

Citing an informant, Ravenhill documents the estate life of dependents that is "built into them" so that, in the words of one of her informants, "they have no desire or inclination to change their lifestyles and do better."[84] Ravenhill then proceeds to document the various ways in which governments have attempted to combat this dependency culture, commenting that "(P)eople become the children of the welfare state, growing up expecting that the State will provide."[85] Ravenhill cites the Social Security Acts of the late 1980s, which reduced benefits to homeless youth, as attempts to address dependency culture.[86] As Ravenhill has it, dependency culture in the 1990s came to be managed by both government and the voluntary or social service sector. And while Ravenhill acknowledges that such policy stems from an individualistic philosophy that is "overly concerned with discouraging dependency,"[87] the consistent narrative of homelessness presented is one of a culture of dependency.

Ravenhill's ethnography, while eschewing the "individualistic philosophy" of the stereotypical lazy poor,[88] nonetheless proceeds to document the ways in which the "dependency on the homeless culture"[89] prevents individuals from resettlement into mainstream society. Contrasting the settled lives of mainstream society with the "rooflessness" of homeless people[90] Ravenhill documents not only the structural but also the "behavioral and emotional factors that are inextricably entwined within people's lives" lead to "becoming locked into the homeless culture."[91]

According to Ravenhill, the dependency of homeless culture consists in the coping strategies of dependence which are sought out and learned by homeless people.

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83 Ravenhill, *The Culture of Homelessness*, 60.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., 61.
87 Ibid., 238.
88 Ibid., 135.
89 Ibid., 3.
90 Ibid., 3–4.
91 Ibid., 3.

> Some homeless people were exceptionally needy. There appeared to be a void, a vacuum inside that nothing filled; there was almost a childlike need to be loved and cared for. These people had often spent large proportions of their life in institutions, especially psychiatric hospitals. They learned coping strategies involving high dependency on others, use of casualty facilities and any means available to gain attention from people in caring roles (such as daycentre staff, nurses). Institutional care or attention from professionals was interpreted as a form of affection that temporarily filled the vacuum.[92]

In addition to the childlike emotions and attachments, Ravenhill highlights other features of those locked in homeless culture, including the values of survival and endurance, the valorization of violence and rape, the use of jargon and self-stigma, aggression, territoriality, and a general culture of violence.[93] This general culture of violence, furthermore, is said to be due to an anaesthetizing effect on the emotions of homeless people that can be traced to the early childhood environment of the family. According to Ravenhill, early experiences of violence anaesthetize the emotions of the homeless which "lock the individual into addiction, the homeless culture and cycles of episodic rooflessness."[94] According to Ravenhill, learning the coping strategies of homeless culture is often exacerbated "by low self-esteem, befuddled brains from years of substance abuse and raw emotions."[95]

Ravenhill's characterization of the anaesthetized emotional register of those locked into homeless culture appears strikingly similar to many aspects of earlier historical accounts of both primitive noble savages as well as Mayhew and Spradley's urban nomads. Again, because of the alleged void or vacuum posited as the source for homeless persons' childlike need for dependency, homeless individuals appear as developmentally primitive and, because of the thesis of anaesthetized emotions, are also prone to violence:

> The homeless culture is very volatile; aggressive arguments and violence can erupt at any time. There are times when there is jostling for power, status and respect. Many of these power struggles take place around territorial ownership and, to a lesser degree, the ownership of people

92 Ibid., 164.
93 Ibid., 165–166.
94 Ibid., 104.
95 Ibid., 204.

> (often women or weaker people dependent on the group) within that territory.[96]

These recurring descriptions of violent, territorial struggles and the back-and-forth display of childlike and aggressive emotions resembles quite closely exploration-ethnographies of the noble savage and his primitive emotions.

6 Cultural Encounters

As some reviewers have noted, Ravenhill's ethnography of homeless culture fails to avoid pathologizing the homeless.[97] Indeed, the emotional and behavioral characteristics Ravenhill describes as being endemic to homeless culture are precisely those associated with anti-personality disorders such as sociopathy and psychopathy. In criminal psychiatry, childhood sociopathy is said to develop in dysfunctional families, where violence is

> "eroticized by the child as the only available means of rationalizing maltreatment and maintaining some form of necessary emotional contact." Moreover, because the abuse and pain cannot be comprehended by the victim, they must be "anaesthetized" if the pain is to be reduced: but the resulting "deadening of emotion" is precisely what produces sociopathy in the child.[98]

Thus the cycle of violence and dependency Ravenhill describes as endemic to homeless culture is at the same time a description of what criminal psychiatry considers sociopathic tendencies. Furthermore, Ravenhill's emphasis on the process of resettlement of the homeless reproduces the cultural divide between a settled, civilized population and an unsettled, primitive population. In this way, the pathological cycle of violence endemic to homeless culture described by Ravenhill contributes to their unsettled condition which in turn makes settlement difficult and intransigent, since the homeless are so culturally different.

96 Ibid., 166.

97 See Guy Johnson and Chris Middendorp, "The Culture of Homelessness," *Housing, Theory & Society* 27, no. 3 (2010): 274–276.

98 Elliot Leyton, ed., see Introduction, in *Serial Murder: Modern Scientific Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2018), xxv.

I want to argue that pathological characterizations found in accounts of homeless culture stem from the implicit colonial knowledges that historically inform ethnographies of the homeless. The importation of the colonial encounters of ethnography can be seen in recent approaches in transcultural theory which applies the analysis of the cultural difference of foreign cultures and ethnic minorities to the study of homeless populations. In Law and John's application of transcultural theory to the study of homeless populations,[99] we find the argument that practitioners must prepare themselves for the cultural encounters of the homeless. Taking the cue from the study of foreign cultures and ethnic minorities, Law and John advance the notion that the homeless differ in their mode of communication, their sense of time and space, their social organization, sense of control, and their biological variation.[100] Law and John write,

> Cultural concepts such as a shared diet, shared habits, shared ways of living and shared language can clearly be identified within the homeless culture. Several studies within Europe, demonstrate a high prevalence of illicit drug use and heavy drinking among the homeless (Crane and Warnes, 2001; Power and Hunter, 2001; Muller, 2001).... As with any cultural or sub-cultural group, a unique language can also be identified, for example 'skippering' for sleeping rough.[101]

Similar to minority ethnic groups, the authors claim to have identified "a tendency among the homeless for a lower future time perspective,"[102] cultural variations in personal space,[103] and even what they refer to as "biological variation" which is, "Due to lifestyle, environment and poverty.... The biological phenomena draws attention to the nutritional deficits of the homeless, which can be exacerbated through alcohol and drug use alongside poverty and inadequate cooking facilities."[104] Biological variation is here meant to refer to complex health needs of the homeless such as traumas, infections, and physical and mental health problems.[105] Yet no explanation is given as to why health

99 Kate Law and William John, "Homelessness as Culture: How Transcultural Nursing Theory can Assist Caring for the Homeless," *Nurse Education in Practice* 12, no. 6 (2012): 371–374.
100 Law and John, "Homelessness as Culture," 373.
101 Ibid., 372.
102 Ibid., 373.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid., 374.
105 Ibid.

problems and trauma produce biological variation of the homeless. This seems to presuppose that homeless persons, by experiencing the trauma and poverty endemic to their culture, actually become different *biologically*. Perhaps this is not what the researchers intend, but no explanation is given as to why we ought to associate health problems and trauma with some peculiar biological variation of the homeless.

Since the authors claim that merely emphasizing problems of homeless culture leads to disempowerment, John and Law endorse Ravenhill's strategy of emphasizing homeless culture as "a culture of both violence and fun."[106] This approach, the authors write, should be followed with the understanding that there are "key and complex pathologies … common to the homeless,"[107] and "certain 'damaging' cultural habits [which practitioners must try to replace] … with other 'more healthy' and 'appropriate' habits."[108] This process of replacing the pathological and damaging habits of the homeless with more healthy habits is referred to as cultural patterning. Again here, because the homeless are understood through their spatial, temporal, linguistic, and biological variation, the homeless are viewed as a culture just like any other minority ethnic group (in transcultural theory). In this sense, encountering the homeless appears as a similar project to the colonial encounters of native primitive peoples who must be understood and objectified in order to help them, lift them up, and bring them out of their unsettled condition.

Once again, the dual imagery of the violence and fun of homeless culture evokes representations of the noble savage in colonial exploration-ethnographies, which were then applied to the poor. Much like Spradley's account of the essential passivity of the urban nomad in his relation to time, cultural perspectives on homelessness reproduce an image of the homeless subject who appears to live in an alternative space-time continuum. This cultural distance, as Spradley first coined it, suggests that any attempt to resettle the homeless must involve reorienting the homeless back into the normal space-time continuum that the rest of us inhabit. But perhaps even more unsettling is the implicit link that cultural approaches establish between the poverty of the homeless and their psychological, linguistic, and *biological* difference from normal, settled populations. Indeed, claims about the psychological, linguistic, and biological variation of the homeless ring eerily similar to colonial theories of racial degeneracy. In the early twentieth century, such

106 Ibid., 372.
107 Ibid., 373.
108 Ibid.

theories claimed that the closer the white man comes to becoming homeless, the more biological variation is seen in terms of racial degeneracy. In his 1915 *Civilization and Climate*, Ellsworth Huntington writes,

> When the white man migrates to climates less stimulating than those of his original home, he appears to lose in both physical and mental energy. This leads to carelessness in matters of sanitation and food, and thus gives greater scope to the diseases which under any circumstances would find an easy prey in the weakened bodies. The combination of mental inertia and physical weakness makes it difficult to overcome the difficulties arising from isolation, from natural disasters, or from the presence of an inferior race, and this in turn leads to ignorance, prejudice, and idleness. Thus there arises a vicious circle which keeps on incessantly. From its revolving edge a part of the community is thrown off as poor whites, whose number increases in proportion to the enervating effect of the climate and the consequent speed with which the circle revolves. That climate is the original force which sets the wheel in motion seems to me evident, because it is only in adverse climates that we find the 'cracker' type of 'poor white trash' developing in appreciable numbers. If white men lived a thousand years in Egypt it seems probable that a large proportion of them would degenerate to this type. Whether they would still retain an inheritance of mentality sufficient to keep them ahead of a similar body of negroes can scarcely be determined.[109]

Such theories of racial degeneracy due to wandering from one's home, once again, presupposed a colonial distinction between the settled, civilized Aryan race and the unsettled, uncivilized nomadic races. In this way, theories of biological variation have explicitly been used in colonial narratives to justify the superiority of civilized, settled white race over the uncivilized, unsettled nomadic races who inhabit the dark spaces of the city. By failing to challenge this basic Eurocentric chronotope of home/homelessness, cultural approaches to the homeless continue to fall prey to the pathologization/criminalization paradigm (sick-talk/sin-talk) *and/or* the exoticization paradigm (difference talk) that underwrites the marginalization and otherness of those subject to housing deprivation, dispossession, and discrimination.

109 Ellsworth Huntington, *Civilization and Climate* (New Haven: Yale, 1915), 3.

7 Conclusion

The characterizations of homeless culture above, I argue, show two related tendencies that I've sought to illuminate by charting the colonial encounters of urban ethnography. First, as Goff and colleagues note, the ascription of primitive or primary emotions to certain out-groups is one way that in-groups attempt to dehumanize perceived out-groups.[110] The ethnographic production of such implicit knowledges about the primitive emotions and survival strategies endemic to homeless culture, I argue, can be traced to the colonial knowledges of foreign, non-European peoples developed by colonial ethnography and anthropology. Ravenhill and Law and John's ethnographic production of knowledge about homeless culture, I argue, fails to challenge the methodological assumptions of Eurocentrism which interpolate homeless and nomadic populations as inhabiting pre-modern or primitive modes of space, time, life, and labor. As a result, I argue that accounts of homelessness such as these which fail to challenge the basic logic of the system of classification and coding that situates the homeless in this way will either fall prey to the criminalization/pathologization paradigm (sin-talk/sick-talk), *and/or* will end up romanticizing or exoticizing the marginalization and otherness of the poor (difference talk) in a way that complements neoliberal social policy.

Secondly, the overemphasis on the risk-taking nature of homeless urban nomads—a theme which can be traced back to Nels Anderson's 1921 study of *The Hobo*—uncritically reproduces the idea that homelessness, in general, is a matter of deliberate choice. In these imaginaries, the risk-taking homeless, following Quijano, have been relegated to a sphere of nonwaged labor by which they must survive or perish: indeed the same logic presented to indigenous populations in the colonial context. It is here where the colonial logic of survival or perish for nonwaged populations merges with neoliberal logics of adaptation, survival strategies and risk. As Madden writes,

> The pre-texts of apprehension that enable associations of contemporary urban homelessness with the 'primitive' and a trans-historical idea of the poor always with us require some attention. Not least because of their potential use as distractions from the active construction of homelessness in the post/modern present. Arguably, a focus on 'adaptation' is a focus that is not fixed on 'resistance.'[111]

110 Goff et al., "Not Yet Human," 293.

111 Madden, "Braving Homelessness," 18.

Spradley's definition of culture, for example, does *not* refer to overt behavior, but rather the rules of adaptation that urban nomads use to survive.[112] For Spradley, the decisions of urban nomads operate within a risk analysis of security and survival that applies to their entire life and milieu as a nomad. In fact, for Spradley, urban nomads are identical to beings whose entire existence is defined by risk. When an urban nomad learns to hustle in prison, "he has learned about his own identity, how to take risks, what is involved in reciprocity, and what resource are needed—principles which have a close correlation with his life."[113] This emphasis of risk-taking as the identity and lifeblood of homelessness itself, Madden writes, signals

> a shift to a neo-liberal mode of government of poverty advocated the minimising of state intervention and maximisation of individual autonomy through a series of preventative measures. Discourses of poverty therefore emphasised the danger of state dependency and the desirability of self-sufficiency.[114]

As Gershon articulates in her analysis of "Neoliberal Agency,"[115] neoliberal reconfigurations of subcultures such as homeless culture present many problems for not only anthropologists and ethnographers but also philosophers. Not only do neoliberal conceptions of agency martial the very idea of subcultures as a self-marketing tool, it also "homogenizes all actors into corporate forms that endeavor to balance alliances, risks, and responsibilities."[116] Under this conception of agency, Goshen argues, "(T)he care neoliberal agents must take … is to minimize the risk and 'misallocated' responsibility that these partnerships can potentially lead to."[117] Thus the emphasis of neoliberal approaches to homelessness turn on the notions of *responsibility* and *agency*. As disability scholars Mitchell and Snyder argue, neoliberal representations of homelessness enact a sort of bait-and-switch by ascribing to the individual both the *agency of* and *responsibility for* one's irregular mode of life and the toxic consequences to which such a life exposes oneself.[118] Neoliberal representations rely not only upon recognition of the agency and self-sufficiency of

112 Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk*, 7.
113 Spradley, *You Owe Yourself a Drunk*, 250.
114 Madden, "Braving Homelessness," 3.
115 Illana Gershon, "Neoliberal Agency," *Current Anthropology* 52, no. 4 (2011): 537–555.
116 Gershon, "Neoliberal Agency," 546.
117 Ibid., 540.
118 David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism and Peripheral Embodiment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 37.

informal or irregular forms of work and housing arrangements, but they also rely upon the construction of the toxic risks and hazards of such arrangements as quasi-natural phenomena inherent to the choices of marginalized populations and risky cultures of poverty and homelessness. By constructing the risks and hazards of much informal or irregular work and housing as simply part of the entrepreneurial game of life and death internal to homeless culture, neoliberals leave it up to the individual to make the best of socio-economic and institutional abandonment. As Craig Willse argues,

> it is vital to the well-being of neoliberal capitalism that individuals be abandoned to self-directed entrepreneurial activity. In other words, entrepreneurs are exactly what neoliberalism demands—people who can figure out how to make something out of nothing, who can determine on their own how to survive eroding social welfare nets, sinking wages, and decreased opportunities for formal employment and job security.[119]

Disability scholars Mitchell and Snyder suggest that one reason why more equitable models of bodily care and support might not be sustainable in marginalized communities is precisely because of the "compounding vulnerabilities of poverty, environmental hazards, insufficient food, the laborious demands of the hustling life, and the toxic exposures of homelessness" that such communities experience under the neoliberal conditions of late capitalism.[120] In other words, personal attitudes and behaviors of abandonment are more easily produced under sustained conditions of systemic, socio-economic abandonment. Mitchell writes that, without the systemic and socio-economic conditions that allow communities to sustain equitable practices of care and support, "conditions of tense existence on the edge of late capitalism might otherwise cultivate a biopolitical response of indifference, neglect, and willingness to let die."[121] In this way, accounts of homelessness that represent homelessness, homeless culture and forms of homeless labor as a simple matter of deliberate choice tend to downplay systemic inequality and ignore narratives of struggle, resistance, and exiting homelessness. Decolonizing our understanding of homelessness, I argue, begins by rejecting representations of the homeless as the passive poor, independent urban noble savages, or survivor-entrepreneurs of voluntary, nonwaged labor.

119 Craig Willse, *The Value of Homelessness: Managing Surplus Life in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 67.

120 Mitchell and Snyder, *The Biopolitics of Disability,* 113.

121 Ibid.

As a final illustration, consider the following example of a recent homeless initiative in California. In 2014, Mayor Maryann Edwards of Temecula, California, commenting on the city's "Responsible Compassion" campaign, identified the core of the campaign's basic approach to homelessness by emphasizing individual responsibility and financial austerity. The City's "Responsible Compassion" campaign coupled surveillance initiatives and anti-feeding ordinances with the reduction and off-loading of housing and homeless services to volunteer and charitable organizations funded by private donors. Remarking on the City's homeless initiative, the Mayor was quoted as saying, "Homeless people panhandling on the off ramps are homeless by choice…. They have rejected all forms of help and have chosen instead to play on the sympathy of generous residents."[122] Here, the general category of homeless people is associated with a particular form of labor (panhandling), which is in turn described as a voluntary choice. This characterization of homelessness brings together several themes I have discussed in this essay, and which collectively may be referred to as *the coloniality of homelessness*.

What I term the coloniality of homelessness refers to the way in which the conceptual mapping of our understanding of homelessness has been constructed on the basis of a racial and economic system of classification and coding which naturalizes the violent reproduction of inequality through the production and representation of nomadic bodies and populations. The production and classification of nomadic bodies and populations, as I attempted to show, can be illustrated in the colonial encounters of the social sciences (*anthropology, sociology, urban ethnography*). Eurocentric chronotopes of homelessness, therefore, refer to the way in which homeless and nomadic populations are perceived as inhabiting pre-modern modes of space, time, life, and labor. As a result, I argue that accounts of homelessness that fail to challenge these Eurocentric chronotopes of homelessness and nomadic populations will fall prey either to the criminalization/pathologization paradigm (sin-talk/sick-talk), *and/or* will end up romanticizing and exoticizing the marginalization and otherness of the poor (difference talk) in a way that complements neoliberal social policy. At the same time, focusing on systemic injustice (system-talk) *without* challenging the logic of classification and coding of home/homelessness, will overlook the ways in which system-talk has been used alongside criminalization, pathologization, and marginalization of the poor as an exoticized Other. Nonetheless, approaches that remain within Eurocentric chronotopes

122 Scott Keyes, "Mayor: People Are Homeless 'By Choice,' Won't Use City Funds to Help Them," May 2, 2014, <https://thinkprogress.org/mayor-people-are-homeless-by-choice-won-t-use-city-funds-to-help-them-a4ef85099oce/> [accessed 17 October 2017]

of nomadic bodies and populations will fail to question the axiomatic assumption that individuals are to be coded according to the divisions between *Home/Homeless*, *Settled/Nomadic, Modern/Pre-Modern*, *Civilized/Uncivilized.*

But how might we get beyond the colonial encounters of urban ethnography and conceptual approaches to homelessness in general, and by extension, the reproduction and re-enactment of dispossession that comes with the objectification of the homeless as an always-already dispossessed population? In *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism and Liberation Theology*, Dussel clarifies that, "(P)overty is in no way a pure case of someone lacking something. There is no scarcity without someone having taken the something away from the other, oppressed person."[123] For Dussel, the poverty-wealth relation is a constitutive relation that cannot be understood without the insight that the concept of the oppressor

> belongs to the very substance of the concept of being poor. There are no poor people without the corresponding rich.... To take the poor out of their dialectical and constitute relation with the rich, the oppressors, is an ideological (i.e. theological) trick played by the rich so as to be able to define themselves as the 'spiritually poor', thus rejecting the meaning of the concept.[124]

For Dussel, the poverty-wealth relation is mediated not by material want or lack but sin in the form of oppression. The historical shift of the concept of poverty-as-oppression to poverty-as-lack since the 4th century AD constitutes, for Dussel, at the same time the ideological shift of the concept into an ideology of oppression. Indeed, by failing to directly define poverty-*as-oppression*, the ideological transformation of the concept makes it so that "the condition of want has been confused with the condition of oppression."[125] Just as Foucault had observed in his 1977–78 lectures *Security, Territory, Population,*[126] Dussel notes that, with the emergence of liberal capitalism comes the economic analysis of scarcity and poverty as a natural phenomenon inherent to the economic relations between population, land, and resources. According to the ideologists of North American capitalism, Dussel writes,

123 Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism and Liberation Theology,* ed. Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 89.

124 Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy,* 90.

125 Ibid., 91.

126 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977–1978* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).

> poverty is a reality without history, something absolutely *natural*. It need not be explained by domination or exploitation but simply by the size of the surface area of the countries in question, their population, their natural resources, etc. There need not be blame or guilt of any sort. Poverty can be 'mitigated and alleviated' with alms, with aid, with various projects. Those who give alms and create projects can have quiet consciences; they are, even better, admirable Christians who 'love their neighbor.'[127]

Just as the starving only starve because they have been robbed, so too the homeless are homeless only because they have been dispossessed. In the context of homelessness, Dussel writes that "(T)o build a house for the homeless is an ethical duty demanded by the liberation principle; but it should be a house in which the victims have symmetrically participated in the design and in its actual construction."[128] By holding up the supreme good of a future utopia without victims as a regulatory ideal, "serves to help criticize the domination that prevails in the reality around us and reveal the victims it produces, but it is not sufficient to enable historical achievement of the supreme good."[129] In other words, because the work of liberation is firmly rooted in the process of the qualitative progress of humanity—that is, within history—Dussel's analysis leads him to conclude that a sustainable ethics of liberation "teaches us to be attentively critical and in permanent struggle."[130]

So as to be attentively critical and in permanent struggle, Dussel gives us a historical sense with which we may begin to de-colonize our understanding of poverty and, by extension, our conceptual thinking about homelessness and the precarious categories of the homeless, the bum, the hobo, etc. As I have hoped to show, understanding the coloniality of homelessness means remaining close to the ethical and historical standpoint of liberation which Dussel reminds us of, always being critical of conceptual and historical approaches which mask, ignore, or downplay the violent reproduction of systemic inequality, injustice, and the narratives of struggle and resistance which illuminate and inspire a liberatory imaginary of a world without domination, oppression, and dispossession.

127 Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy,* 91.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.

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