**Tester, Frank J. (2009) *Iglutaasaavut* (Our New Homes): neither “new” nor “ours”: housing challenges of the Nunavut territorial government, *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43(2): 137-158**

Keywords: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, crowding, history of housing policy, homeownership, Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ), Nunavut, Nunavut Housing Corporation, social housing

Tester evaluates the housing crisis in Nunavut by examining the history of housing programs and policies implemented by Canadian federal and territorial governments. He specifically critiques the programs and policies of the Nunavut Housing Corporation (NHC) and western concepts of economics and housing (p. 137).

The first government subsidized housing program for Inuit was the Eskimo Housing Loan Program, which operated from 1959-1965 (p. 141). This rent-to-own program provided “matchbox” houses made out of plywood. “Matchbox” houses were less than 300 square feet and rent was around $10 a month. According to Tester, Inuit income and the cost of building maintenance made housing unaffordable for Inuit, and the “matchbox” houses were eventually incorporated into federal welfare programs.

The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation (NTHC) was created in 1973 to use CMHC funds “for public housing rental units, to manage the social housing stock and to encourage home ownership (p. 142).” The NTHC, with the assistance of the CMHC and Employment and Immigration Canada, created the Small Settlement Home Assistance Grant Program in 1974. The program was later renamed the Homeownership Assistance Program in 1984 (p. 143). This program provided Inuit a forgivable loan of $40,000 for building material costs and transport. Under the program, homeowners were obligated live in the house for a minimum of 5 years and pay taxes and utilities. Most Inuit, however, could not participate in the program due to low incomes. The program was dissolved in 1992.

The Inuit Non-profit Housing Corporation was an Inuit co-operative created under the *National Housing Act* but, according to Tester, the co-op did not make a significant contribution for provision of Inuit housing (p. 143). The policy of the NTHC suggested that little to no support was given to co-operative housing initiatives.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the federal government continuously pulled funding from public housing (p. 143). The purpose of this withdrawal was to encourage private homeownership among Inuit. But a majority of Inuit still relied on public housing for their housing needs. The Canadian federal government withdrew financial support from social housing in 1993 (p. 138). According to Tester, this withdrawal significantly impacted Nunavut and Nunavik.

The Nunavut Housing Corporation (NHC) was created in 1999. Its mandates were to administer housing programs for Nunavut residents that provided affordable housing options, maintain a staff housing program, and create a homeownership and capital program (p. 148). About 75% of the NHC’s budget was allocated to its public housing program in 2008, and these finances were allocated to local housing organizations.

Addressing issues of housing conditions, Tester states that the harsh northern environment as well as overcrowding has contributed to the rapid aging of homes (p. 145). In 2001, it was determined by the CMHC that 54% of Inuit in Nunavut experience overcrowding in their houses. This figure were determined by Inuit personal and privacy needs, the number of people, age, gender, and number of bedrooms (p. 146). According to another survey, Inuit believed their concerns regarding health, family, work, and other issues could be resolved with fewer people in their homes (p. 147).

Tester attributes the absence of a housing market in Nunavut to poverty, high capital and operating costs, and cultural considerations (p. 140). At the same time he critiques the argument that the housing shortage is an economic problem. He argues that Inuit communities do not share the same concepts of housing ownership as Euro-Canadians (p. 139).

Overall, Tester explains the intricacies of numerous housing programs, policies, reforms, and initiatives that attempted to solve the housing crisis in northern Canada. He contributes these struggles to a lack of Inuit cultural understanding by policy makers. In other words, the relationship between Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) and housing policy was never adequately considered (p. 153). He suggests alternative solutions. One is that the NHC should use its resources to further develop elements of its social housing program. A different method of housing allocation is also suggested. A new system could allow Inuit families the responsibilities of dividing resources among their kin group (extended family). In other words, the system would be family-oriented, co-operative rather than an allocation system based on family alliances (p. 154).

Tester states that the housing crisis in Nunavut can only be solved through the large application of federal funds. He questions the federal government’s commitment to Inuit needs (p. 155). He also calls for strong advocates to propose alternatives to existing housing policies.