"It's not like your home": Homeless Encampments, Housing Projects, and the Struggle over Domestic Space

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Abstract:

Based on an analysis of housing projects and homeless encampments in Fresno, California, this paper argues that both anti-homeless policing and housing provision mutually constrain homeless people's expressions of home, such that struggles over domestic space have become integral to the contemporary politics of US homelessness. In particular, this article asserts that contemporary homelessness policy is marked by a clash between competing visions of home. While housing projects in Fresno are based on a model of privatized and surveilled apartments, people who lived in local encampments often asserted alternative notions of home grounded in community rather than family, mutual care rather than institutional care, and appropriation rather than consumption. Meanwhile, local officials viewed such alternative domestic spaces as non-homes worthy of destruction. Rather than valorizing domestic struggles above public or institutional struggles, this article seeks to move beyond geographic binaries to more holistically approach the politics of US homelessness.

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In 2013, city officials in Fresno, California announced an unprecedented plan to demolish every homeless encampment in the city and set up a police taskforce to prevent anyone from erecting structures in the future. At a press conference announcing the plan, the head of the Fresno Housing Authority described it as "part of a broader effort within the community to provide permanent supportive housing." Yet the plan only included a few dozen new housing subsidies and would prevent more than 2,000 homeless people from creating self-made shelters. In Fresno, homeless people I spoke with often described their encampments as homes that provided protection, comfort, privacy, and community on the streets. In contrast, they often rejected subsidized housing as unhomelike. Thus, the city's plan would effectively impose unwanted domestic norms onto homeless people while preventing them from creating their own homes.

With growing income inequality and housing insecurity in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, more people in the US today are living collectively in urban encampments. Cities have largely responded with a politics of eviction and demolition (Hunter et al 2014). Meanwhile, the latest "housing first" trend in homeless management has been shown to privilege a model of domestic space that ignores the needs of homeless communities themselves (Klodawsky 2009). Based on a case study of Fresno, I argue that both anti-homeless policing and housing provision mutually constrain homeless people's expressions of home, such that the struggle over domestic space has become integral to the contemporary politics of US homelessness. This insight speaks to debates in geography on the meaning of home and the history of US housing, while also broadening the current scope of geographic literature on homelessness.

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With its large-scale encampments and intensive housing subsidy program, Fresno is an ideal city through which to examine the politics of home in relation to homelessness. This paper is based primarily on interviews and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Fresno during the summer of 2013. Out of the 24 people I interviewed, nine were officials involved in homeless management, eight were homeless, and seven were local activists. I used snowball sampling to select homeless participants and interviewed people from multiple racial backgrounds, genders, and ages. Further, all homeless participants had lived in encampments, although several were staying at subsidized apartments or shelters when I interviewed them. I also consulted two key media sources—the *Community Alliance Newspaper* and *The Fresno Bee*—and reviewed policy reports, legal documents, and online videos and radio programs depicting homeless activism and evictions. Finally, I spent hours hanging out at local shelters, housing projects, and encampments.

During analysis of these materials, one of the themes that recurred most often was the clash between competing visions of home. In an era marked by large-scale urban encampments and intensive housing subsidies for the homeless, the dynamic in Fresno suggests that struggles over domestic space are integral to the contemporary politics of US homelessness. In the first part of this article, I review the relevant geographic literature on homelessness and home and describe a brief history of struggles over domestic space in the context of US homelessness. I then trace homeless Fresnans' ongoing struggle to create homes in public spaces and their resistance to city evictions. Finally, I explore how housing projects in Fresno reinforced eviction practices and often imposed unwanted domestic norms onto homeless communities.

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A Geographic History of US Homelessness and Domestic Space

Much of the geographic literature on urban homelessness in the US has focused on public and institutional spaces. Mitchell (2003) has shown that as cities across the nation outlawed homeless sitting, sleeping, and camping in public space, police not only targeted homeless people, but slowly eroded the historic ideal of public space as open to use by all urban dwellers. A wide range of scholarship has tracked these processes in cities across the US (see Mair 1986; Davis, 1990; Smith 1996; Mitchell, 1997). In seeking to nuance understandings of the punitive public sphere, geographers have also argued for greater attention to the myriad institutional "spaces of care" in US cities, including homeless shelters and treatment facilities (see Cloke, Johnsen and May 2007; Murphy 2009; May and Cloke 2013). Deverteuil, May, and Von Mahs (2009) argue that such spaces reveal a more complex politics of homelessness that is both punitive and compassionate.

Yet this focus on public and institutional spaces has tended to overshadow the political importance of domestic space, which reinforces larger tropes of home as a feminized sphere cut off from the larger world of politics and economics. In the US, the boundary between home and work flows from a historic ideology of the home as a refuge for men to return to after long hours of work (England and Lawson 2005; Rose 2010). Feminist geographers have asserted the importance of the domestic sphere to urban dynamics and deconstructed the ideological separation between private and public spaces (Hanson and Pratt 1988; Mackenzie 1989; Watson 1991; Mitchell et al 2003). Rose (1993) argues that just as feminine understandings of space have been traditionally repressed, so too have spaces associated with femininity—in particular the domestic realm. Politics in the home have been historically viewed as secondary to politics in

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the workplace, public space, the city, and the nation. Yet geographers have shown that the home is central to global geopolitical forces such as empire and colonialism (Domosh 1998; Blunt 1999; Brickell 2012). The home is also at the heart of feminist struggles against unpaid domestic labor and gender-based violence that are crucial to understanding public life at the scale of the city.

For geographers, the home is a "spatial imaginary"— both a space and an idea (Blunt and Dowling 2006). It is a site rich with social meaning (Hayward 1975; Porteous 1976; Tuan 1977). This meaning is not fixed, but varies across time and place, and according to identity and scale (Mackenzie and Rose 1983; Pratt 1987; Williams 1987). Some characterize home as a relationship to community (Douglas 1991; Robinson 2005). For others, it is a creative relationship with space, in which homemaking can reinvigorate and poeticize one's material surroundings (Douglas 1991; Bachelard 1994). These myriad understandings reveal that notions of home are highly contested and cannot be regarded as neutral (Gregson and Lowe 1995; Holloway and Hubbard 2001).

The fluidity of home is particularly marked in the context of homelessness. As Baxter and Brickell (2014) argue, home is a process that is both made and unmade, rather than a static location. This process of home unmaking and remaking is central to the experience of homelessness. Geographers have acknowledged the ways in homeless shelters and public spaces come to function as homelike sites to return to and from which to venture forth (Datta 2005; Veness 1994; Sheehan 2010; Herbert and Beckett 2010). Others have argued that recent efforts to house homeless people have reinforced problematic notions of domesticity (Klodawsky 2009; Rich and Clark 2005). Yet by and large, the geographies of homelessness have overlooked the

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ways in which private and intimate domestic space is integral to the urban politics of homelessness. As I show in this section, struggles over domestic space have a long history in the politics of US homelessness.

The history of US housing has cemented a particular vision of domesticity that excludes those who fail to conform to white, middle-class, and masculine norms (see Walker 1981; Hayden 2002, Harris 2013). The exclusions inherent in dominant notions of home are perhaps most acutely expressed in the context of homelessness. Access to housing has long been governed by relations of private property, and state intervention has historically privileged property owners over others (Bratt et al 1986). The history of US housing reveals ongoing efforts of homeless communities to create non-propertied homes, and state efforts to destroy them.

In the 1930s, millions of people lost their homes to the Great Depression, and many turned to squatter settlements for housing. Residents named encampments "Hoovervilles" to mock the failed policies of President Herbert Hoover. Many such Hoovervilles were sites of resistance to the capitalist status quo (Mitchell 2012). In response to widespread unrest, the federal government established the US Housing Administration and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation to stimulate the low-cost housing construction and subsidize suburban mortgages. In the wake of these policies, homeownership skyrocketed and suburban mortgaging became the middle-class norm (Bratt et al 1986). As the model of privatized housing became deeply entrenched over the last century, collective and informal homes were increasingly marginalized (Wardhaugh 1999).

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In the 1980s, urban homelessness once again exploded in the wake of the neoliberal rollback of the welfare state (Kasinitz 1986; Peck and Tickell 2002). Squatters across the nation took over thousands of units of vacant housing, some of which resulted in legally recognized collectives and self-managed housing projects (Dobbz 2012). Activist struggles also culminated in the 1987 McKinney Act, which stimulated a flood of competitive grants to shelters and the growth of a massive "bureaucratic structure for the management of homelessness" (Gowan, 2010:48). Still, the number of available shelter beds remained vastly inadequate to meet the need. The increasing visible presence of homelessness sparked what many have termed a "compassion fatigue" in the popular imagination. This, in turn, contributed to a climate in which cities across the nation began to outlaw homeless sitting, sleeping, and camping in public spaces (Mitchell 1997; 2011).

As shelters became the primary model of housing for the homeless, state intervention continued to conflate homes with marketized and privately occupied dwellings. Only those who resided in single-family houses, apartment buildings, and mobile homes were considered housed; those who resided in group homes, institutions, transitional housing, shelters, and public spaces were relegated to the category of homelessness and subjected to government management and control (Veness 1992). Veness (1993), for example, shows how families living in shanties in rural Delaware moved into a local homeless shelter to avoid having their children taken away by the state. Others who lived communally in small rental units were forced to move to a shelter after being evicted because "overcrowding" violated the rules of their lease. Yet in both cases, families possessed more autonomy and security prior to being forced to relocate to a shelter, and felt less at home in an institutional setting. Veness writes, "a home-less shelter is deemed closer

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to the socially-prescribed definition of home than many of the alternative versions of home that … poor people can piece together" (1993:331). Thus, rigid understandings of home foreclosed the possibility for people to create their own domestic spaces.

Since the housing crisis of 2008, urban homelessness has risen among families and children (Hunter et al 2014). As with the Hoovervilles of the Great Depression, squatter settlements today provide poor people a space to build self-made shelters and communities. The popular press calls them "tent cities," a phrase that captures how such campers have created their own urban forms. As of 2014, at least one-hundred reported encampments existed in cities across the nation. Local governments have largely responded by passing anti-camping ordinances and engaging in eviction campaigns (Hunter et al 2014). In resistance to evictions, homeless activists have demanded their right to camp (Hunter et al 2014; Mitchell 2012). Several camps have managed to achieve tenuous legal status and create semi-permanent neighborhoods with alternative, collective home-making practices (National Coalition 2010). With the re-emergence of large-scale informal housing, homeless communities today are once again challenging dominant notions of the meaning of home, while state intervention continues to police these expressions of domesticity.

As the "American dream" of privatized, for-profit housing condemns outliers to the category of homelessness, the latest government program of housing assistance for the homeless also fails to incorporate alternative expressions of home. For decades, scholars and activists have advocated for a right to housing as the solution to homelessness (Michelman 1970; Hartman 1998; Bratt et al 2006). In 2010, in response to ongoing advocacy, the US Interagency Council on Homelessness adopted "housing first" as its primary model for addressing homelessness. The

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model dispensed with treatment prerequisites and aimed at immediately securing housing for homeless people. In this way, it responded to the call for greater housing rights for the homeless. In recent years it has become the primary model adopted by hundreds of cities across the nation and promotes an ambitious vision to end "chronic homelessness" in the next ten years (Tsemberis 2010).

Although "housing first" has come as a triumph to many advocates, it nonetheless remains grounded in the paradigm of privately-owned, for-profit housing. Scholars have argued the stated goal to immediately house the "chronically homeless" is rooted in the neoliberal trend to remove visible homelessness from public space and reduce the costs of caring for homeless communities (Willse 2010; Hennigan 2013). In addition to following market logics, "housing first" has reproduced dominant notions of what it means to live in a home, rather than responding to the needs and demands of local homeless communities. Such initiatives are often grounded in a privatized model of housing, despite the fact that collective living arrangements may be more beneficial for residents (Klodawsky 2009; Rich and Clark 2005).

As I show in the sections below, homeless communities in Fresno created some of the largest and most enduring encampments in the nation. Meanwhile, the federal government selected Fresno as a priority city in which to implement "housing first" initiatives. As such, Fresno is an ideal city through which to explore the politics of home in relation to contemporary US homelessness.

Homeless Encampments and the Struggle over Domestic Space

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As the largest city in California's impoverished San Joaquin Valley, Fresno is home to some of the nation's poorest communities (California Healthcare 2009). In 2011, with an estimated population of 5,135 homeless people, Fresno had the second highest rate of homelessness in the nation (National Alliance 2012). Fresno also suffers from a severe shortage of homeless shelters and is the largest community in the nation without a "come-as-you-are" emergency shelter (Fresno Restoration Project 2014:6). Thus it is unique not only in the size of its homeless population but also in the limited nature of its shelter options. By 2013, 84% of Fresno's homeless population remained unsheltered at night (Fresno Madera 2013). Official estimates based on survey data found that the majority of unsheltered homeless people were adult men, and that only 16% of "households" included children (Fresno Madera 2013).

For more than a decade, homeless people have taken refuge in encampments concentrated mostly in the city's downtown. Following the 2008 recession, Fresno's camps briefly captivated the nation, and countless news stories described the plight of out-of-work waitresses and truckers who lived in large-scale encampments. References to homeless camps in this area can be found dating back to 2002 (National Coalition 2010). Although the exact date of its inception is unknown, an encampment colloquially referred to as New Jack City traced its beginnings to earlier encampments in the city's abandoned rail-yards. A second encampment, referred to by residents alternately as Little Tijuana and Taco Flats, emerged on an adjacent property in 2007 (National Coalition 2010). When I arrived in Fresno in 2013, seven encampments dotted the city's downtown area.

Over the years, local officials pushed for periodic and aggressive campaigns to demolish the encampments, citing that they constituted garbage to be removed by sanitation crews. During

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a two-year period beginnings in 2005, the city conducted at least 50 sweeps (Kincaid 2006). Yet after each successive wave of evictions, homeless Fresnans created new encampments. As one homeless woman told me, "You're going to keep tearing down their stuff; they're going to keep putting it back up." In 2006, the city bulldozed a particular encampment in downtown Fresno every two weeks (Kincaid 2006). Many of the evictions were recorded on film and made publicly available online. One video depicts a woman sitting on her couch in the morning light, watching as bulldozers destroy her shanty. A sign on one of the structures says, "All property here is valuable. Do not destroy" (c blove 2014). Another woman stands behind the tarp of her constructed home, surveying the wreckage around her. She says, "I ended up here and I'm trying to make the best of it and take what they throw away to build a home … and they come out here ... and they're stepping on my friend's home" (c blove 2014). Her statement reveals that what the city characterized as trash was in fact a home.

News reports reflect that encampments in 2009 contained informal housing composed of tents as well as shanties made of wood, tarp, and other recycled materials (National Coalition 2010). Many homes had functioning roofs, clean interiors, and paintings hanging on walls (Saunders 2009). One reporter described Taco Flat as a vibrant example of informal urbanism:

> The people in Taco Flat are extremely self-reliant, and their homes reflect that. They're made from a very eclectic mixture of salvaged material. I saw everything from shipping pallets to going out of business signs and Bollywood film posters. They have oftentimes separate rooms for sleeping, cooking and relaxation, and fenced in yards for their pets. You can see that people are really trying to reclaim a kind of personal space that has been denied to them in the mainstream housing market and in homeless shelters. (Chan and Whittaker 2009)

In 2009, an out-of-work construction worker built several sheds for himself and his friends. In an interview, he described his encampment as a "neighborhood of homeless":

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> We built shacks. We started with one. And someone else needed a place to stay and before you know it, we had about fifteen of them all in a row. We picked up the trash. Cut the grass. Cleaned up the area. It turned into a real beautiful spot for taking care of each other. (Riddell 2009:137)

Thus, homeless Fresnans were able to construct alternative self-made housing out of found materials despite the ongoing evictions.

In 2013, I visited seven encampments in Fresno that ranged in size from a few residents to communities of several dozen. They occupied both public lands and abandoned private lots. Each encampment was located strategically in order to access specific domestic needs. Four of the camps I visited were located close to Fresno's day-shelter so that residents could attend the regular meal service. Three camps were situated alongside canal banks and residents used canal water for drinking and bathing. Two were underneath highway overpasses as protection from the sun in the sweltering summers. By locating strategically, homeless Fresnans used public infrastructure and institutions as a source of protection, comfort and survival.

Further, by appropriating public space for domestic purposes, the encampments collectively challenged the boundary between public and private space. Officials rejected encampments precisely for defying this division. As one official told me, "I don't think that necessarily a lifestyle of placing encampments in public places and even on private property—that isn't consistent with abiding by the laws of the country, of the community. It's inappropriate." Another official echoed this sentiment: "We definitely need a no-camping ordinance ... Because yes, the homeless people have rights, but there are property owners. Literally there are people sleeping on their property." Similarly, officials repeatedly stressed that encampments must be removed because they presented a threat to "legitimate homeowners." This dynamic reveals that the encampments were viewed as illegitimate because were

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appropriated rather than owned, thereby challenging the legitimacy of capitalist private property and the distinction between public and private space.

Like earlier reported encampments, the 2013 encampments displayed complex domestic living arrangements that included tents, shanties, and structures with multiple rooms and fenced-in backyards. I visited one woman in her 100-square foot home composed of pallets, tarps, and flat pieces of wood elevated off the ground to prevent infestations. Inside, she had furniture and decorations on the wall. Her kitchen was an outdoor fire pit surrounded by couches, and her bathroom was a communal portable toilet. I spoke with another man who described his home in the camps:

> I had a twelve man tent. I had couch, coffee table. I tried to make myself as comfortable as possible. I had carpet on the floor. I had it on top of pallets with plywood so when it rained it didn't get wet … I had a gas burner, a stove … You just take it one day at a time … We looked out for one another.

By putting effort into creating comfortable structures, homeless Fresnans were able to create domestic space out of materials that other city residents had thrown away. Instead of purchasing homes on the market, they created them out of appropriated materials and spaces. In this way, they engaged with home as a creative process outside of the sphere of capitalist consumption.

Many campers I spoke with explicitly advocated a notion of the encampment as home. One woman told me she was terrified when she first became homeless, and it was not until she "put up this little tent" that she began to feel comfortable living on the streets. Another woman expressed a similar sentiment:

> People out here consider their tents or their wooden buildings their home … This is something that people are doing for years … That's their shelter. That's the only way to beat the heat, the winters, and stuff like that. … Don't just assume that their home is garbage because you see a little bit of garbage around it, or just because it's not like your home. We're just trying to survive. It may be a crappier version than what you're used to.

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But it's a home. That's how they get by. That's how they're safe. It's comforting to them … Just because your home is better and you think ours is garbage, doesn't mean it isn't a home … When I was staying in a tent, that was my safety, especially when I was by myself … There was a tent. There was walls. I had some protection.

Her description of the fabric of her tent as "walls" indicates a conception of home as a form of material protection distinct from the physical dimensions of a building. For her, home did not necessitate permanent concrete structures, glass windows, or monthly rental payments. She asserted an alternative material vision of home in direct opposition to the official rhetoric that relegated the encampments to the status of garbage.

Many people noted that the absence of middle-class consumer amenities did not undermine the homelike qualities of their tents and shanties. One woman described her encampment as a "neighborhood" even though "it's not a *usual* neighborhood. We don't have yards and lawns and alarm systems and stuff like that." Another woman said, "Just because you in a *house* house doesn't mean nothing … Just because [other people's] home is nice, it has air conditioning, a heater, and they have carpet and stuff like that, and plenty of room, that doesn't mean what they have out there isn't a home." In their feminist analysis of homelessness in the UK, Watson and Austerberry (1986) assert that for some, a well-insulated shanty might constitute an adequate house. They cite Marx in arguing that the notion of adequate housing is socially determined: "A house may be large or small; as long as the surrounding houses are equally small it satisfies all social demands for a dwelling. But let a palace arise beside the little house, and it shrinks from a little house to a hut" (Marx quoted in Watson and Austerberry 1986:10). In Fresno, encampment residents recognized that their tents and shanties failed to meet mainstream notions of adequate housing, but asserted that they were homes nonetheless.

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Beyond enabling material comfort and privacy, tent cities also allowed for the creation of stable community. In 2009, community members often shared long relationships stretching over years of life on the streets (National Coalition 2010). In New Jack City, it was not unusual for neighbors to look after one another and take turns watching over each other's property (National Coalition 2010; Saunders 2009). Little Tijuana displayed similar community cooperation. In the cantina, communal meals were cooked and served to all residents (National Coalition 2010):

> There was always coffee going in the afternoons and there was drinking in the evenings … While there was no governing committee or camp leader, there was a core group of members who coordinated the food who also took an active role in organizing the community. Little Tijuana had a mayor that was looked to among the community's members to settle disputes and organize actions. (National Coalition 2010)

In 2013, I witnessed people sharing meals and possessions. People often opened their homes to newcomers, creating a form of housing provision not dependent on government subsidies or rental payments. One woman said of her tent city neighbors, "They want to be around other people. They feel safer" (Hostetter 2008). Ray Polk, a local homeless minister, said, "I'm very appreciative to the homeless community because I've always said that it saved my life." (TakePart 2012). Another resident described how tent city neighbors take care of each other: "If you don't got a tent, and we got an extra one, we'll make sure you have one and a mattress to sleep on" (Dr. Jean Kennedy 2011). Thus, by living in encampments, homeless Fresnans were creating a new kind of home in which individuals and families were part of a larger collective tied to each other through relations of mutual care.

Often, the only recourse for survival was the support of others in the encampment. One man told me that the community *had* to take care of each other, because they could not rely on anyone but themselves: "As long as [people] have their fucking comfortable job and little

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fucking comfortable apartment or a house, they could give a shit … We're on our own. Plain and simple. We look out for each other." Another camper credited her neighbors with saving her life:

> I am 62, and I had a heart problem with the heat this last summer, and if it hadn't have been for my neighbors, I might have perished because they poured cold water over me and brought me back to … Until I was found and went to [this] camp, that's the only time during my homeless time that I felt at home and I felt safe. (Homelessness Marathon 2014)

As one homeless man told me, after he lost everything when his tent was destroyed during the winter, he was able to survive the night because his friend gave him a blanket. Cloke, Johnsen, and May (2007) have noted that while care ethics are most often expressed in the home, for homeless people care often emerges in the form of volunteer-run shelters and institutions. Yet homeless Fresnans indicated that the mutual care in the encampments often surpassed any care provided by local institutions. In this sense, care was essential to the home-like quality of the encampments, and they often constituted more vital spaces of care than local institutions.

Collective living arrangements have a long history in US political struggles. Hayden (2002) argues that early-20th century "material feminists" saw the division between public and private as the root of women's oppression, and sought to produce a new kind of collective domestic life in order to break free from the bonds of unwaged domestic labor. They organized against the suburban home in favor of homes with public kitchens and communal backyards to enable shared domestic labor. Similarly, Wagner (1993) argues that homeless communities often reject traditional bourgeoisie family structures, and instead create friendships communities, serial romantic partnerships, informal adoptive relationships, and other non-normative family forms. Yet this resistance to private family life comes with consequences. Watson and Austerberry (1986) show how housing policy for the homeless in the UK privileged nuclear, heteronormative

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families and required beneficiaries to conform to dominant family forms. In Fresno, official

rejection of encampments was often attributed to their failure to conform to domestic norms. One

shelter operator described how his shelter restored camp residents to domestic normalcy:

> A mother can come in and be in a secure location, being observed 24/7, having all the programming as far as being a good mother, learning domestic issues and how to make a family thrive, how to be able to cook … If you're going to come here you need to have the mindset that you're going to want to get your life together, and reintroduce yourself back to society, back to your family … This is how a family should live.

Thus, the defiance of traditional family ethics contributed to the official perception that

encampments were not adequate homes and that homeless people must be placed in shelters to

be integrated into mainstream domestic norms.

In response to encampment destruction and shelterization, homeless campers waged a

tireless struggle against the city. In 2008, hundreds of documented victims of the evictions filed a

class-action lawsuit against the city for violating their constitutional rights (National Coalition

2010). During the hearings, the courtroom was packed with homeless activists (Rhodes 2006).

Although the courts issued an injunction against the city, it ultimately continued the evictions,

sparking a series of ongoing lawsuits. In 2010, about 50 homeless men and women marched

from their encampment to the courthouse to protest an attempted eviction (Rhodes 2010). That

same year, tent city residents were able to save an encampment from destruction by refusing to

move when police told them to (Borkert 2010). Again in 2011, on the eve of massive tent city

demolition, homeless Fresnans and their allies held a press conference at City Hall calling on the

mayor to abandon the planned evictions (Rhodes 2011a). When police arrived at the

encampments, campers linked arms, sang songs, and stood for hours blocking the bulldozers

(Guy and Lloyd 2011; Rhodes 2011b). Finally, in 2012, homeless Fresnans demanded

legislation that would allow encampments to remain autonomous and self-governing (Rhodes 2012b). In fighting the evictions and demanding autonomy, tent city residents were not only defending their homes, but asserting their ability to define for themselves what constitutes a home. In many instances, protesters were able to stop the evictions, but by 2013 the city set up a police taskforce to prevent anyone from camping again.

In policing public space, Fresno officials were simultaneously policing the domestic space of the encampment. By continuing to construct homes in public, homeless Fresnans were challenging the public/private divide and the commodification of domesticity that are at the heart of mainstream housing. But the homeless in Fresno did not just make homes in public: they also challenged dominant ideologies of domestic space by calling the encampments *home*. They built living arrangements for mutual support and survival, thereby revealing that institutions are the not the primary sites for homeless people to receive care and that the nuclear family is the not the primary model of domesticity. Although homes in the encampments were far from ideal— the lack of sanitation infrastructure in particular presented a host of daily hardships (Speer 2016)— they nonetheless provided a modicum of security, community, and autonomy to those who struggled with the daily reality of homelessness. Further, they offered an alternative to the privatized and market-driven model of home championed by advocates of "housing first." As I show in the following section, officials in Fresno focused on a limited definition of housing, effectively ignoring the homes that people erected across the city.

Housing Projects and the Struggle over Domestic Space

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While the struggle over evictions continued, city officials began taking another tack. In 2008, the city received an influx of federal grants, and adopted its Ten-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness under the "housing first" model. Officials planned to secure long-term housing for 941 chronically homeless people over a ten-year period (Culhane and Metraux 2010). Formerly homeless tenants were required to pay a portion of their income in rent. Many homeless Fresnans would never be afforded a "housing first" subsidy, as the federally-defined category of "chronic homelessness" refers only to unaccompanied individuals who have been homeless for a year or more and who suffer from a disabling condition. By 2012, federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) identified Fresno as a high-priority city in which to implement "housing first." The city received an influx of federal funds and technical assistance. Officials earmarked 4.5 million dollars for the development and operation of three new housing projects, the most prominent of which was the Renaissance at Santa Clara (Usichgov 2012).

The Renaissance project was a site of intense contestation. It was constructed in a site where homeless people had once camped. Thus, the city had to evict the campers in order to proceed with construction. After development, several encampments still surrounded the project, and city officials lamented that newly-housed homeless people were exposed to encampments just outside the building. As one official told me, "I just am concerned that those people who are living inside that building, and who have an interest to get themselves back on their feet again, it makes it tougher when they walk outside the building and they've got an environment like they've got around them." Officials hoped that by removing the surrounding encampments, they could transform the neighborhood. As the head of the Fresno Housing Authority (FHA) said, the name "Renaissance" was chosen to reflect that the development was "a renaissance within the

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neighborhood" (Usichgov 2012). In an eerie reflection of the dynamics of gentrification, the "unsheltered" homeless were thus evicted to make room for the newly-housed.

In Fresno, the officials who pushed strenuously for encampment evictions were the very same people who spearheaded "housing first" programs. In 2013, the head of the FHA met with city officials to discuss the logistics of the "de-encampment processes" ("Boards" 2013). As one local advocate summed it up: "They got the clear message that if they got rid of the encampments that more money would be forthcoming from the Obama administration." The FHA actively assisted in the "de-encampment" of several tent cities. An FHA memorandum states that "the de-encampment process … provides an interim and partial component to a larger, longer term community solution being developed based on the 'housing first' philosophy" ("Boards" 2013:17). In this way, officials implemented a two-pronged policy of bulldozing homes in order to build houses, both of which effectively policed homeless people's alternative expressions of home. Such policy not only condoned the destruction of people's homes— it also denied that they were homes at all.

In addition to struggling for their right to create homes in the encampments, homeless people and local activists protested the high cost of the Renaissance at Santa Clara. The total bill for the project was more than $10 million, amounting to $145,029 for each cramped 340-square foot studio apartment (City of Fresno 2011). Funds were only used to house 69 people, a small fraction of Fresno's homeless population. As one homeless man told me about the project, "I think that's kind of a waste of money, to tell you the truth … because you don't even have maybe a handful of homeless people just in there." At a 2008 event, Alphonso Williams, a longtime homeless activist, spoke out against city spending:

> Millions and millions and millions of dollars have been given to Fresno, and nothing has been out there to show for it. Absolutely nothing. People living in the bluffs, off the money that's been given. People got their new cars. People got their CEO jobs, with a big salary … Homelessness is a business now … There's something wrong with that picture. (Mike Rhodes 2008)

Williams saw that "housing first" was being used as a strategy to maintain the status quo, rather than address homeless people's domestic needs. Developers did indeed benefit from "housing first" funds. The FHA championed a model of public-private partnerships and worked closely with developers in promoting "housing first" initiatives. The developer for the Renaissance project also chaired the board that designed the Ten-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. Incidentally, his company was awarded a "developer fee" of $1,115,400 (City of Fresno 2008). Thus, in Fresno, "housing first" contributed directly to private business interests.

In addition to questioning city spending, homeless Fresnans also critiqued "housing first" for being heavily surveilled. One homeless man told me that the Renaissance project was "just like monitoring the homeless." A homeless woman echoed a similar sentiment: "They do room checks, random room checks. There's so many rules in there." Residents had to report to onsite case managers. The complex was surrounded by high metal fencing, and a security guard manned the locked outer door. At least 40 security cameras lined the building, at every hallway and entrance (Rhodes 2012a). The project also required residents to undergo initial screenings, which were often viewed as intrusive. As one shelter operator said, "How many people will be willing to go in? We have one lady here that she would like to go in, but one of the things they have to do I guess is a mental health screening. She refused." Thus the

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climate of securitization and intrusive screenings left many homeless Fresnans skeptical of permanent housing.

In her analysis of US urbanism, Jane Jacobs (1961) argued that access to privacy is indispensable to public life. She wrote that for those who reside in public housing, "the sense of privacy has already been extensively violated. The deepest secrets, all the family skeletons, are well known not only to management, but often to other public agencies" (1961: 67). This lack of privacy, in turn, encourages an insular environment in which public housing residents struggle to maintain a modicum of private life. For homeless people, who live under police surveillance on city streets and institutional surveillance in shelters, privacy is especially tenuous (Sparks, 2010). Paradoxically, shanties erected in the public sphere often afforded homeless Fresnans greater privacy than dwellings provided by the city, in that they enabled residents to engage in communal, public relationships at their own discretion. Tents and shanties afforded residents a personal realm embedded within a communal domestic space that included shared bathrooms and kitchens. Thus, homes in the encampments included both personal and public space, in stark contrast to the often strict public/private divide reinforced by mainstream housing.

Many people also told me they could not live in permanent housing facilities because their pets and families were not allowed. Scholars have noted the deep mutual bonds that develop in homeless encampments (Rowe and Wolch 1990) as well as the importance of animals to many who live on the streets (Labrecque and Walsh 2011). Indeed, one study found that more than 90% of homeless people with pets would refuse housing in which their animals were not allowed

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(Singer et al 1995). Fresno is no different. This deep attachment to friends and animals on the

street plays a key role in the rejection of housing. As one local advocate said:

> It's really difficult to get [homeless people] to get an apartment because they have such a
> strong community out on the street. It's like asking them to leave home to get an
> apartment. And of course they all have stray dogs. Most of the apartments won't allow
> that. And then you just plunk someone in an apartment where he doesn't know anyone.
> It's really hard for them to stay.

Several homeless people expressed resentment that permanent housing facilities were not set up

to accommodate homeless families or communities. As one woman said: "They used it for

singles … It should've been for couples and families." Officials also recognized this problem. As

one of the primary architects of the Renaissance project told me, evictions were necessary

precisely because homeless people rejected the isolation of housing:

> If you do not enforce the laws, if you tacitly approve of allowing homelessness and
> encampments and that sort of thing, you can be certain of one thing, they will
> continue to grow ... There's certainly a percentage that … don't dislike living on the
> streets, and in a way maybe you can kind of understand, the people that they now
> know on the streets, these are their friends, these are the people they're comfortable
> with … This is their world.

Rather than wrestling with the problem of the enforced isolation in housing projects, this

official characterized homeless people as *choosing* to be on the streets. For him, the solution

was not to rethink government housing, but to force people to conform to mainstream

domestic norms.

For some people, the isolation of life inside a house is more dangerous than life in the

camps. One woman told me she preferred sleeping on the streets, because in public she had

protection from her abusive partner: "I was ok with sleeping in the open, because in the open I

figured, hey, people will help me out if I got into a fight … I believe I was safer being homeless

than I was with him in a home, because there's less he could do in public." For people

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experiencing domestic abuse, a four-walled house or apartment can become a place of violence and isolation (Warrington 2001). Meth (2003:321) argues that for victims of domestic violence, formal material space "offers both protection (locking doors and windows, hiding in a secure room), but it also introduces the reality of isolation and abuse in seclusion." For these reasons, Watson and Austerberry (1986) urge that housed victims of domestic violence might be better understood as homeless, because home is not only a physical structure, but a network of social relations. For some women in Fresno, the encampment was more homelike than an isolated and violent household. Despite this reality, officials failed to incorporate alternative models of home into their housing initiatives.

It is important to note that homeless Fresnans did not universally reject the model of home promoted by "housing first." Often, they viewed it as preferable to the encampments. I interviewed one man who lived at the Renaissance project and who expressed great relief at having obtained an apartment, despite the rules attached to his residence. In particular, he expressed relief at having regular access to a shower and toilet, as the lack of sanitation in the encampments made finding and maintaining employment nearly impossible. Nonetheless, the "housing first" model remained undesirable or unattainable for many homeless Fresnans, which indicates a need for diverse models of home to accommodate diverse needs. As one activist stressed, each encampment in Fresno created its own unique neighborhood structure and its own model of communal life. Yet "housing first" in Fresno imposed a single model of home onto a diverse population.

Today, "housing first" is still underway in Fresno. Officials urge that they have made great progress in their efforts to solve the problem of homelessness locally. Nationally, advocates

of "housing first" argue that it is a progressive move away from the US shelter system (Tsemberis 2010). In this way, "housing first" can be characterized as promulgating new "spaces of care" for the homeless. And yet the provision of state subsidies effectively denied homeless Fresnans the ability to create their own spaces of mutual care. The situation in Fresno reveals that where housing provision is rooted in uncritical notions of home as private, for-profit, and surveilled, it stifles people's demands for a different kind of home.

Conclusion

In the summer of 2013, just a week after I left Fresno, local officials destroyed every encampment in the city and set up a police taskforce to prevent anyone from rebuilding again. Tragically, the domestic space of the encampment has now disappeared from Fresno's urban landscape. Yet encampments continue to grow and emerge in other cities across the nation, and the politics of eviction and housing provision continues. As such, the lessons derived from Fresno are still pertinent today.

In critiquing housing projects in Fresno, I do not intend to denigrate the provision of housing subsidies, but simply to trouble the notion of home as market-based and privatized structures rooted in the model of the isolated nuclear family or individual. Although access to housing is imperative, in Fresno, officials forced homeless people into housing situations that were often undesirable, and foreclosed the possibility for homeless communities to resist state surveillance or create collective spaces of care. Similarly, in arguing that the encampment was home, I do not seek to romanticize poverty or ignore the difficulties of living without sanitation or legal tenure. Rather, this paper reflects the arguments of homeless people in Fresno who

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characterized the camps as homes that merited development rather than destruction. In some cases, possessing a tangible structure called home, no matter how insecure or poorly constructed, affords a sense of wellbeing on the streets. Many people living in Fresno encampments considered their tents and shanties the best housing option available, and saw the threat of government eviction as the primary barrier preventing their access to domestic space.

Finally, the situation in Fresno reveals the centrality of domestic space to the contemporary urban politics of homelessness in the US. In destroying people's ability to congregate, sleep, cook, or erect a tent in public, anti-homeless laws not only police public space— they also police the meaning of home. Meanwhile, housing provision aimed at creating new homes paradoxically suppresses homeless people's expressions of domestic life. These insights speak to a need for the geography to push beyond its current focus on the politics of homelessness in public and institutional spaces, to include more analyses of the politics of domestic life in the absence of formal housing. Yet in asserting that struggles over urban space unfold at the scale of the home, I do not seek to reinforce existing binaries between public and private, urban and domestic. Instead, this paper highlights the historically specific nature of these spatial divisions and the possibility for a new kind of space. Homeless people in Fresno who seek to create a modicum of domesticity in the public sphere achieve precisely that— a dissolution of geographic binaries.

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