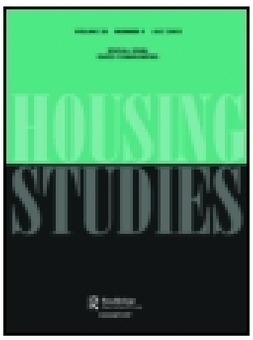

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Making home or making do: a critical look at homemaking without a home

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the concept of alternative forms of 'homemaking' among people without a settled home. The introductory section establishes the framework for the paper, providing an overview of homelessness and the homemaking literature. Strengths in the homemaking approach are identified, which reconceptualises homelessness as a human-centered phenomenon that can be understood as 'resistance' to societies that block accesses to mainstream housing for people who are (also) socially and economically marginalised. Homemaking moves beyond mainstream academic analyses which explore homelessness in terms of 'sin' (addiction and criminality), 'sickness' (poor health, especially poor mental health) and 'systems' (housing market failure and inadequate social protection and public health systems). The paper argues that, while important in refreshing our thinking about homelessness by offering a new, radical epistemology of housing, homemaking is limited by not contextualising the dwelling practices it seeks to explain, particularly in respect of how it defines 'homelessness' and also risks misinterpreting transitory behavioural adaptations as something deeper.

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Introduction

This paper is an invited contribution to a guest edited issue of Housing Studies which focuses on 'Homemaking without a home: Dwelling practices among homeless people'. The goal of this paper is to critically assess the new theory that is coalescing around the concept of homemaking, a new analytical framework for understanding and looking for solutions to homelessness that challenges the mainstream homelessness literature. The paper reviews homemaking theory before moving on to a critical analysis.

Mainstream homelessness literature, i.e. the most commonly cited and widely read research and theory produced by academics studying homelessness in the last 40 years

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which is mainly, though not exclusively, centered on Europe, North America and Australia has tended to examine homelessness within set frameworks. Gowan summarises this mainstream literature as focusing on 'sin' (addiction, criminality), 'sickness' (poor health, particularly poor mental health) and/or 'systems' (housing market failure, failures in social protection and public health systems) (Gowan, 2010).

Mainstream literature began to pursue what has been termed a 'new orthodoxy' from the early 1990s onwards, which attempts to bring together approaches centered on individual causation ('sin' and 'sickness') with structural causation ('systems') within a single conceptual framework. The new orthodoxy focuses on creating taxonomies of 'types' of homelessness, i.e. combinations of individual characteristics and experiences, e.g. addiction, a disrupted childhood or mental illness, that are interpreted as *increasing the risk* that homelessness will be 'triggered' by structural factors, such as inadequate social protection, systemic failure in public health services or overheated and dysfunctional housing markets (Pleace, 2016). More recent work argues that individual's decisions and actions were neglected in 'new orthodoxy' debates that sought to explain homelessness in terms of individual needs, characteristics and experiences (but not individual choices) and structural factors (which are beyond the control of people experiencing homelessness), effectively removing any agency from people experiencing homelessness (Parsell, 2018; Pleace, 2016).

Homemaking theory shifts the debate about the nature of homelessness. Focusing on the dwelling practices of people experiencing literal homelessness (i.e. living rough and in encampments/squats), homemaking argues that the experience of 'homelessness' is not experienced passively, but is an expression of *resistance* from people experiencing homelessness through their creation of alternative versions of 'home' (Herring, 2014; Lancione, 2019; Lenhard, 2017). Homemaking therefore views homelessness is an external construct, a definition *imposed* on people whose own ideas of whether or not they have a 'home' may differ radically from the various categories of 'homelessness' into which they may be placed by politicians, administrative systems, researchers and, indeed, 'homelessness' services.

Some scholars have enthusiastically endorsed homemaking as a way of challenging orthodox, normative constructions of home and offering a vision of a 'new radical housing future' (Lancione, 2020, p. 275). The goal of disrupting existing epistemologies of housing is an ambitious political project, challenging as it does rights and ethics-based arguments that focus on establishing the minimum housing standards people should be able to enjoy. Indeed, it is precisely this point that has led some scholars to view homemaking as an 'unfortunate misstep' that ignores the 'manifest injustice' of homelessness by treating people experiencing homelessness as 'exotic outsiders' (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2020, p. 298).

Drawing on empirical and theoretical research from the Global North this paper examines the contributions of homemaking to the literature on homelessness. We note that homemaking correctly highlights both the relative lack of attention paid to the agency and self-determination of people experiencing literal homelessness and the disconnect between mainstream homelessness research and wider social science research (Lancione, 2016).

However, we also argue that homemaking also fails to adequately contextualise the experience of homemaking within broader social and economic structures, underplaying the 'manifest injustice' of being without an orthodox home. We also contend that homemaking is limited by focusing on a small subgroup of people experiencing literal homelessness, rather than exploring homelessness as a whole, that its conclusions are, perhaps somewhat ironically, based on ideological, cultural, historical and mass/social media constructs of what 'homelessness' is, rather than the lived reality of people experiencing homelessness in Europe and beyond. It is further argued that the homemaking literature does not sufficiently distinguish between shared sets of contingent and adaptive behavioural responses and the idea that a specific 'dwelling as difference' subculture exists among people experiencing literal homelessness. Here we argue there is a risk that ultimately transitory adaptative behaviours risk being misinterpreted as representing coherent resistance to normative constructs of home and offering a vision of a more 'radical housing future' (Lancione, 2020, p. 275).

Homemaking and homelessness

Two key concepts in homemaking are agency and resistance. Agency refers to the ability of those experiencing homelessness to influence their own trajectory, i.e. the experience of homelessness is understood, at least in part, by the person experiencing it. Agency also means exercising a degree of control over presentation of self and place. At the simplest level, an example could be someone viewing a tent in an encampment as 'home', i.e. a definition that is different from most cultural and societal definitions of what a 'home' is (Lancione, 2019; Marquardt, 2016a; Ruddick, 1990; Veness, 1993). Resistance exists on two levels within the homemaking literature. First, other ways of living are interpreted as constituting resistance to cultural norms about what having a 'home' is. Second, resistance means literally and figuratively building other ways of living, creating other versions of 'home' because the orthodox versions of home are inaccessible.

From the homemaking perspective, social scientific analysis should not be about people on whom an (imposed) definition of 'homelessness' has been applied, but is instead about people living in versions of home that are 'weird'. For Lancione this 'weirdness' means dwellings that are outside the cultural, social and politically and economically sanctioned mainstream, i.e. making a home that is located in the social and economic margins rather than existing within and also reinforcing mainstream culture (Lancione, 2019, 2020). This literature says that it does not want to romanticise homelessness and it describes 'homemaking' in often dangerous, chaotic and physically ghastly circumstances (Herring, 2014; Lancione, 2019). But, at the same time, homemaking is also presented as delivering rewards for the people experiencing it, for example the 'love', the 'care' and the 'dreams' achieved by people who are homemaking in (degraded) underground infrastructure are described as 'impossible above ground' (Lancione, 2020, p. 282).

Homemaking focuses on people's own definitions and images of self and home (Lancione, 2019), beginning with the contention that homelessness is an externally imposed categorisation. This is not entirely new – debates about subjective and

objective definitions of homelessness have been around for decades (see for example, Chamberlain and Johnson, 2018). Homemaking is centered on understanding the creative and resourceful practices that people deploy to deal with lacking an orthodox home, in their creation of their own versions of home (Lenhard, 2018).

Lancione (2019) expresses this focus in terms of 'dwelling as difference', i.e. people living in ways that are 'deemed incompatible with normative ideas of life under Capitalism, or that inhabit places that are conventionally defined as quintessentially uninhabitable' (Lancione, 2019, p. 2). Dwelling as difference, homemaking while 'homeless', is simultaneously a symbolic and tangible expression of a different way of living that is outside the conventional frameworks of what a home should be, and how a life should be lived. In a political, as well as physical, sense homemaking is *resistance*, because it involves people building a their own alternative of home in the face of societies that do not provide them access what is culturally, economically and politically defined as an orthodox 'home' (Lancione, 2019).

Homemaking explores how people create a sense of home, on the streets, in structures not designed for permanent (or any) habitation, or in encampments and unregulated settlements. This approach makes homelessness a human-centered phenomenon, shifting focus away from explanations that focus on causation by looking for the right explanatory mix of sin, sickness or systems (Gowan, 2010). Homemaking is instead focused on understanding the imagination, agency, resourcefulness and resistance of people living outside the mainstream. As Lancione argues, dwelling as difference is a weird response from human beings who have to find ways of building home, identity and community outside the mainstream, these practices are not 'weird' for those exercising them, homemaking is defined as 'weird' mainstream culture, politics and systems which, merely by *existing*, homemaking resists (Lancione, 2019).

These ideas, as Herring (2014) notes, resonate with Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, the embodiment of cultural capital, the ways in which experience, habits, skills and disposition are generated by and in turn generate our living environment. Homemaking emphasises how individuals act and react when conventional dwellings are inaccessible to them, by carving out their own space, in terms of both where and how they live. Bourgois & Schonberg (2009) express this in terms of how imagery, culture and patterns of drug use also create markedly differing ways of living and being.

Herring's work on homeless encampments in the USA is a nuanced treatment of homemaking. Drawing on the concept of habitus and Wacquant's concept of social seclusion, he argues that encampments are neither zones of protest, nor zones of neglected poverty. Instead, he argues, homeless encampments, simultaneously banned and tolerated by public authorities, are products of imposed constraints *and* elective choice (Herring, 2014). Talking to the people living in encampments, Herring reports they were an actively chosen option, viewed as better than local homelessness shelters, a point which as much as it draws attention to agency, talks to systemic failures.

The diversity of the experience of homelessness

No single, universally accepted, definition of homelessness exists. While attempts have been made, most notably the European Typology of Homelessness (ETHOS)

(Busch-Geertsema, 2010), no definition, including ETHOS itself, has ever gone unquestioned (Amore *et al.,* 2011).

There is a strong case for a definition of homelessness that encompasses people living within housing and temporary accommodation who have no adequate, legally secure, physically safe and private living space. A woman at threat of violence or abuse in her own home is homeless, as are people living in housing that is unfit for human habitation. Someone whose only accommodation is highly precarious and offers no physical or legal security, nor privacy, such as people staying temporarily with friends, family or acquaintances, because there is nowhere else to go, is also experiencing homelessness (Bretherton, 2020; Busch-Geertsema *et al.,* 2014; Pleace and Hermans, 2020).

Improved data has challenged longstanding assumptions about those experiencing homelessness (Bahr, 1970). Data from the countries of the Global North from the 1980s onwards show the experience of homelessness *not* confined to lone adult men with high and complex needs, centered around addiction and severe mental illness, living on the street and in emergency shelters (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010; Lee et al., 2010; Shlay and Rossi,1992). More women (and often their children) are visible in services for households experiencing homelessness over the last 30 years, and their experiences, needs and there is growing evidence that their trajectories through homelessness tend to differ from men (Bretherton, 2017, 2020). There is also strong evidence of families and adult only households, using emergency accommodation for short periods, whose overriding characteristic is poverty and the inability to secure affordable housing (Culhane, 2018; O'Sullivan, 2020; Shinn and Khadduri, 2020).

As data improved, the idea that those experiencing homelessness were a distinct and deviant subculture, exemplified by the Skid-Row studies of the 1960s and 1970s, began to lose currency. Contemporary homelessness is clearly experienced by a much broader demographic that lone adult men who live and dwell on the street (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018).

Mainstream homelessness research interprets homelessness causation as a conjunction of adverse circumstances, often employing a 'new orthodoxy' framework that looks for taxonomic patterns of individual and structural explanatory mix (sin, sickness and systems) that explain homelessness (Curtis *et al.*, 2013; Pleace, 2016). Some argue that homelessness can be triggered by various combinations of 'bad luck' when several of these individual and structural factors come together (O'Flaherty, 2010). The *Journeys Home* study, a unique, unusually large and robust longitudinal analysis, indicates such patterns of 'bad luck' are present in Australian experience of homelessness (Johnson *et al.,* 2019).

Starting with the pioneering work of Kuhn & Culhane (1998), researchers have applied cluster analyses to time series data on admissions to shelters/hotels that provide emergency and temporary accommodation for households experiencing homelessness in welfare contexts as diverse as the United States, Australia, Canada, Denmark and Ireland (Aubry *et al.*, 2013; Benjaminsen & Andrade, 2015; Kuhn & Culhane, 1998; Taylor and Johnson, 2019; Waldron *et al.,* 2019). With the partial exception of Denmark, these studies all indicated a large, transitionally/temporarily homeless population, whose chief characteristic was poverty and socioeconomic

marginalisation. In the original US study, this transitional group was 80% of the people using emergency shelters, with 10% being episodic (recurrent) users and 10% being chronic (sustained) users.

Kuhn and Culhane's original research found that the characteristics of the three groups differed significantly. Combined mental health and substance use problems were far more prevalent among chronic and episodic, i.e. long term and recurrent shelter users. Rates of limiting illness, disability and markers of extreme socioeconomic marginalisation such as repeat contact with the criminal justice system and effectively permanent unemployment were also very high in these chronic and episodically shelter users. By contrast, transitional shelter users, forming the bulk of those using shelters in this US study, looked very similar to other poor people. American evidence also shows long term and repeated homelessness is disproportionately concentrated in specific age cohorts (Culhane *et al.,* 2013), indeed the American 'chronic' and 'episodic' homeless population is rapidly ageing (Culhane *et al.,* 2019). Flows into long-term and repeat homelessness are not constant, certain age groups are more likely to appear in these populations than others, suggesting the presence of external factors in homelessness causation. In this instance, many people experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness had been (socioeconomically marginalised) young people during major recessions.

Furthermore, Hopper *et al.* (1997) reported an endless loop through an 'institutional circuit' by some people experiencing homelessness in the US, moving back and forth between emergency accommodation, prisons and psychiatric hospitals. While each institution ostensibly has a distinct role such as correcting, rehabilitating, or re-socialising, Hopper *et al.* argued these services 'may have the perverse institutional effect of *perpetuating* rather than arresting the "residential instability" that is the underlying dynamic of recurring literal homelessness and that so often harries the lives of persons with severe mental illness' (Hopper *et al.*,1997, p. 660). Evidence that long-term homeless people with high and complex needs become 'stuck' in systems designed to end homelessness has been consistently reported in the USA (Culhane, 2018), Sweden (Sahlin, 2005), Finland (Pleace *et al.,* 2015); Denmark (Benjaminsen & Andrade, 2015) Ireland (Daly *et al.*, 2018); Australia (Parsell, 2018) and the UK (Jones & Pleace, 2010).

There is also evidence that the level of social protection systems influences the nature and extent of homelessness, i.e. homelessness can be triggered simply by poverty, rather than necessarily being associated with individual characteristics, in countries with weak social protection systems. A very small population, with high and complex needs, falls through the extensive welfare and public health systems of some Scandinavian countries (Benjaminsen & Andrade, 2015; Stephens & Fitzpatrick, 2007). Homelessness is not simply people living rough and in encampments and other informal and unregulated settlements in the Global North. The evidence base shows that individual pathology, homelessness as 'sin' and 'sickness' does not offer a satisfactory explanation of homelessness (Gowan, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2020).

Homelessness research is rich with qualitative accounts of individuals lived experience of homelessness and these studies, understandably, tend to emphasise the role of individual choice, action and characteristics and show that it can influence trajectories

through homelessness. While the evidence base is replete with evidence that shows the limits of individual pathology, the human dimensions of homelessness, including a new stream of research on women's experience of homelessness (Bretherton, 2017) also highlights the limits of purely structural explanations, i.e. there are limits to the 'bad luck' hypothesis, because the decisions taken by people experiencing homelessness clearly do influence their trajectories. By extension, the new orthodoxy, in seeking to explain homelessness as various mixes of 'system', 'sin' and 'sickness', is also flawed, because it centres on taxonomy, clustering people by their characteristics and experiences, taking insufficient account of human agency in examining homelessness (Parsell, 2018).

Literal homelessness and homemaking

Homemaking generally focuses on a group who represent a relatively small proportion (10-15 percent) of those who experience a distinctive form of chronic homelessness in the Global North, i.e. those rough sleeping and shelter users, squatting or in unregulated settlements on a sustained and recurrent basis. Herring's thoughtful work on homeless encampments in the US exemplifies some of the potential definitional tensions within homemaking. He found a disproportionate concentration of 'chronically' homeless people in the encampments, which he interprets as those people desiring a more permanent place on their 'own terms' (Herring, 2014, p. 297). We return to how that reading might be contested in other ways below, but for now, it is clear we are talking about a *specific* group of people experiencing a *particular form* of homelessness. Lancione's study of drug users living underground in Bucharest is again centered on a particular population (Lancione, 2019), as is Lenhard's work on street dwelling drug users in London (Lenhard, 2017) and Bourgois & Schonberg's (2007) ethnography of homeless drug users in San Francisco.

The most powerful signifiers of difference in those experiencing homelessness are viewed through temporal, physical, ontological, behavioural and medical lenses, and in each case are at their most visible in recurrent and long-term rough sleepers and emergency shelter users. Where homelessness is more broadly defined, as is the case in much of North Western Europe, literally roofless people, the focus of studies on homemaking, constitute a minority of those experiencing homelessness.

For example, in Dublin, of those households in emergency shelters and sleeping rough at a point in time, only 3 percent are sleeping rough and the majority of those sleeping rough also use emergency shelters (O'Sullivan, 2020). England estimated 4266 people living rough in the Autumn of 2019, equivalent to three per cent of the 128,340 children, classified as statutorily homeless, living with one or both parents in temporary accommodation (source: MHCLG, 2020). One caveat here is that transitional and hidden forms of homelessness do not appear to exist in the same way in countries with extensive social protection and public health systems, the homeless population tending to have high and complex needs, but existing in only small numbers (Benjaminsen & Andrade, 2015).

The sampling frame, or perhaps more accurately the conceptual lens, being employed in the homemaking literature, is focused very tightly on one small element

of those experiencing homelessness. It could be argued that in order to create the conditions for demonstrating homemaking – in the sense of dwelling as difference – to be presented as a re-conceptualisation of homelessness, it is necessary to focus on this minority who are unable to access, have been ejected from, blocked by, and/or chosen to avoid the formal infrastructure of homelessness services for various reasons.

In limiting its focus to a small sub-group of homeless people, homemaking is a clear danger of perpetuating prejudicial stereotypes that frame the homeless as dysfunctional individuals that inevitably have multiple disabling conditions. This ignores that in much of the Global North people do not have these characteristics (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018) and that their experience of homelessness is one of 'hidden' homelessness and/or one involving use of formal services, not a life on the street or in various forms of unregulated settlement (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014).

Temporal factors are also important. It is arguable that for dwelling as difference to become a manifest, observable phenomenon, homelessness on the streets, in buildings and structures not meant for habitation or in encampments and unregulated settlements needs to have some duration. While someone who is on the streets or in emergency shelter for a few nights before re-entering mainstream housing will, arguably, exhibit at least some element of homemaking, this is very different from someone who has, for example, been living in the same unregulated settlement for weeks, months or years. Something that is not explicitly allowed for in the homemaking literature is the evidence that highlights the fluid and *liminal* experience of homelessness, including for people with complex needs; there is repeated residential instability and institutional transfers, moving from one precarious housing situation to another, into shelters and other congregate facilities, and oscillation between these unstable sites and the streets (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2013, 2018; Culhane, 2018; Kuhn & Culhane, 1998; Parsell, 2018).

To be clear, homemaking is not presented as being a settled state, as living on (or under) the streets, in encampments and improvised shelters is inherently precarious. However, the question here is whether instantaneous homemaking can exist, or must it have some duration. Where homelessness is a fluid, liminal state, shifting between different environments, what does homemaking mean? Is it something that is highly adaptive and as fluid as homelessness itself? Theoretically, can an individual rough sleeper's system for bedding down each night, in different places, that follows what may be a mix of ritual and protocol, built from experience, be regarded as homemaking? How does homemaking manifest itself, how does it help us understand homelessness, where a person is in an emergency shelter, then living rough, then in hidden homelessness, then back living rough, then in an encampment and then in supported housing?

Alongside this, there are people who will enter into and exit out of homelessness, having episodic experiences, who are sometimes housed, sometimes not (Meert & Bourgeois, 2005) and their homemaking might involve both dwelling as difference and dwelling as orthodoxy. How should we read this: as shifts between resistance and compliance? And how might it relate to a radical housing future? This is not to say that homemaking behaviour has to have a specific period of time to occur and take

root, or that it has to be confined to any one place, before becoming observable. Rather, our point is that homemaking analysis defaults to focusing on those experiencing sustained homelessness (Herring, 2014; Lancione, 2019), which is not all homelessness and, in much of Europe, is not *most* homelessness (O'Sullivan, 2020).

Subcultures of homelessness and homemaking

Along with the idea that dwelling with difference might represent an alternative epistemology of housing, another important aspect of homemaking relates to the 'complex assemblage of behaviours' involved (Lancione, 2020). This aspect of homemaking has distinct echoes of earlier research, in particular research that examined skid row and work that focused on homeless subcultures.

In the 1950s and 1960s, and particularly in the United States, a strand of sub-cultural research focused on zones of containment for displaced men, known as 'Skid Row'. Although Skid Row was conceptualised as a distinct contained geographical space where a deviant sub-culture existed, it was also seen as shelter-like. Entering Skid Row was interpreted as a voluntaristic form of disaffiliation from the norms and values of wider society (Bahr, 1973). As Wallace's ethnography of the Minneapolis Skid Row put it, entering this space meant socialisation into a sub-culture (Wallace, 1968).

Skid row and the shelter were seen as broadly self-contained spaces, where 'deviant' and 'disabled' individuals (in the language of the time), who were largely single men drifted into, and then descended into, a sub-culture of alcoholism, apathy and abandonment. However, in a near contemporaneous account of skid row in Los Angeles, Wiseman (1970) highlighted the *transience* and hyper-activity of skid row, arguing that relationships were in a state of 'constant flux'.

Fast forward to the early 1990s and another thesis appeared that large congregate homelessness shelters were producing a 'sub-culture' of deviant and disreputable individuals (Grunberg & Eagle, 1990). Although largely based on research in New York, this idea that congregate shelter facilities reflected and magnified the 'deviance' of shelter users, tapped into a broader conceptualization of homelessness as pathology. The term coined to describe this process, which included decreases in interpersonal responsiveness, neglect of personal hygiene, increasing passivity, and increasing dependency on others, was 'shelterization'.

The debate on shelterization in New York fizzled out relatively quickly, as researchers noted that the majority of shelter users stayed for relatively brief periods of time, or only intermittently. Many maintained ties with the labour market and with families, but simply struggled to secure affordable accommodation (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998; Marcus, 2003). Thus, while a minority long-term shelter users developed strategies of survival in the shelters, given the permeability and transient nature of shelter life, a culture of shelterization was unlikely to develop.

Importantly, careful ethnographic research by, for example, Archard (1979) in London, Wiseman (1970) in Los Angeles, Spradley (1970) in Seattle, and Snow & Anderson (1993) in Texas and Bourgois & Schonberg (2009) in San Francisco stressed how homeless people's lives were shaped by the police and rehabilitative

agencies. This work shows strategies of survival that are explicable as rational acts in extreme and challenging circumstances, but as with earlier work on skid row and shelterization, some researchers again interpreted this and presented it as a 'subculture'. As Bourgois & Schonberg (2009) would later argue, the idea of a single subculture of homelessness suggested by some of this ethnography is problematic as the line between *adaptation* and active, conscious, social *differentiation* from social norms is not clear.

Agency and homelessness

The agency of homeless people is important, we would agree it is not possible to properly understand homelessness without understanding how homeless people shape their own trajectories through homelessness (Parsell, 2018). The homemaking literature has shown that there is modification of environment, organisation of life, even miniature cultures, within encampments and the non-housing, built environments that groups of homeless people can occupy. Agency also manifests itself in other, subtler ways. Women almost certainly tend to *react* differently than men to their experience of homelessness, alongside encountering differing systemic responses (Bretherton, 2017). There is also evidence of image manipulation, the presentation of the self as 'service worthy' (Liddiard and Hutson, 1991; Marvasti, 2002; Mik-Meyer & Silverman, 2019) by homeless people using their agency to access support, or what one popular author has called the *art of being defined as homeless*, i.e. as within the 'deserving' homeless population (Shriver, 2016).

Nevertheless, wider evidence of agency among people experiencing homelessness cannot be simply equated with the idea that there is, in effect a coherent subculture of resistance among people experiencing homelessness, manifesting itself in various forms of homemaking. There is much more work to do before we might be confident that we can distinguish between social and behavioural adaptions that occur in the context of the extreme circumstances and a conscious, deliberate and radical attempt to create an alternative housing future.

For example, recent ethnographic work by Moran and Atherton of people experiencing chronic homelessness in a city in the North West of England highlights this point. Their informants were 'exposed to abuse, violence and exploitation' (2019, p. 62) and their involvement in the illicit drug economy was 'fraught with brutality, menace and ruthlessness.' (2019, p. 74). Some of their informants were killed, others had limbs amputated due to their drug use, but others left this nightmarish world. Their informants made choices, some good, mostly bad, but these choices were always 'circumscribed by the context within which they appear' (2019, p. 126). Based on a series of research projects largely interviewing people experiencing chronic homelessness in Australia, Parsell also emphasises the significance of identity and choice, but pointedly notes that choices are contingent and that the 'state of homelessness clearly constrains one's capacity to choose' (2018, p. 88). This raises a fundamental question about the point at which agency becomes a determinant of the experience of homelessness, rather than one variable in the explanatory mix, if it is the latter, its effects might – at best – be inconsistent and intermittent, rather

representing a coherent form of shared 'resistance'. Some countries effectively ban 'homemaking' practices like establishing unregulated settlements or encampments, as well as living rough, Hungary being an important European example (Udvarhelyi, 2014).

Snow and Anderson's ethnographic study of 168 homeless street people in Texas in the 1980s grappled with the idea of homeless subculture to try and make more explicit the point that behaviour is best understood synchronically and diachronically – that is by examining behaviour over time and the social context in which it occurs. Unlike earlier work in which analysis of 'subcultures' focused on a shared set of norms, attitudes and values they were at pains to make the point that the homeless subculture was:

> … a patterned set of behaviours, routines and orientations that are *adaptive* responses to the predicament of homelessness itself and to the associated conditions of street life (Snow and Anderson, 1993, p. 76, our emphasis).

Rather than changing the individual, changing that common predicament, i.e. exiting homelessness, brings with it changes in behaviours, routines and cognitive orientations (Padgett, 2007). This raises the question as to whether homemaking is anything more than a description of adaptive strategies (Baxter & Brickell 2014, p. 139).

Research on Housing First services, designed for the high cost, high risk group of people experiencing homelessness who are homeless on a repeated and sustained basis, shows a different kind of adaptive response. Resistance to Housing First, if the reader will permit the term, is unusual; populations characterised by difference, by *multiple* levels of sustained rejection from normal life are very likely to stay in the orthodox housing when supported to do so, they do not abandon orthodox housing to 'recover' access to any subculture they experience while homeless (Padgett *et al.*, 2016; Tsemberis, 2010).

There is some need for caution here, there is no reason why homemaking as resistance cannot be followed by settled orthodox housing, i.e. someone might exhibit homemaking, expressing (alternative) dwelling as difference, but given the chance, choose to live in an ordinary home. Any 'resistance' expressed through homemaking while living in an encampment might argued to still have existed, even if it evaporated as soon as an orthodox housing alternative was available. One caveat to these arguments is the point that Housing First, as most homelessness services, is still centered on mainstreaming people who have experienced homelessness back into normal socioeconomic life, i.e. it enables housing orthodoxy, not housing difference (Hansen Löfstrand & Juhila, 2012; Marquart, 2016a). Nevertheless, if homemaking can be ephemeral, we should perhaps be cautious about how much social scientific weight we ascribe to it and, again whether it signifies a pragmatic, contingent set of adaptive responses, rather than purposeful and directed subcultural response centered on dwelling as difference.

Past experience also shows us the risks of placing externally constructed cultural readings on homelessness and the state of being homeless (Philips, 2000). One question here is whether those engaging in 'homemaking' would see themselves and their activities in the same way as those researching them, bearing in mind these are

groups characterised by a near total absence of political power in a formal sense. Their unregulated settlements can be seen as resistance to the normative, but their capacity to speak truth to power is another matter. Borrowing from Herring (2014), who in turn borrows from Wacquant, we return again to the point that part of the conceptual viability of homemaking is a matter of where the balance between elective choice and imposed constraint actually lies, i.e. is dwelling an active, intended, expression of difference or a matter of adaption.

Conclusion

One possible reaction to homemaking might be to bemoan what, at a superficial level, be taken as the resurgence of individual pathology in homelessness research. It took a long time to move on from the idea of homelessness as 'sin' and 'sickness' (Gowan, 2010) and in the midst of burgeoning Neoreaction, anything that might be read as adding fuel to the unsubstantiated idea that all destitution is solely explicable as individual deviance is undesirable. Homemaking risks being (mis)read as endorsing a view that it is acceptable for some people to live below a normative minimum standard of housing, that living in the ways described should be interpreted as a 'positive' expression of self-actualisation, a view that we do not endorse.

However, we would argue that equating homemaking with individual pathology would be a mistake. Homemaking is concerned with the experience of building and sustaining homes in weird forms, because the people making those homes cannot access orthodox housing. These ideas are much more concerned with questions of what living in 'different' dwellings is doing to people and how successfully they are able to live and build homes outside the mainstream. These are not research questions that should be ignored and in the context of exploring radical housing solutions to homelessness, there is a good case for understanding the preferences and aspirations of people living in these situations, be it on the street or in some form of unregulated settlement. Homemaking brings something new to the analysis of homelessness because it seeks to understand literal homelessness on its own terms, rather than in relation to anything else.

Homemaking helps mainstream analysis of homelessness to move beyond what are often essentially limited debates about definition, causation and solution. These limits are not intellectual in the sense that debates in mainstream research grow ever more sophisticated (O'Sullivan, 2020). However, mainstream discussion of homelessness is nevertheless within a broadly impact-driven research framework, focused on the practicalities of how to interpret, map and solve this particular social problem.

However, the narrow focus of homemaking on a population who fulfil all the expectations of mass and social media, alongside fictional and political narratives, of who and what 'homeless people' are, some raises serious questions, about both conceptualisation and methodology. Homemaking is ultimately based around a particular *image* of homelessness that is a cultural, mass/social media and ideological construct of rough sleeping and unregulated settlements that is quite distinct from the social phenomenon itself (Marquardt 2016a, 2016b; O'Sullivan, 2020; Richards, 2000). Most people experiencing homelessness are unlike those whose behaviours and actions are

characterised as homemaking, in terms of their needs, experiences and characteristics and *crucially* in relation to the trajectories that they take through homelessness.

One counter to this is to say that only those people on the streets or in encampments are actually 'homeless'. However, this reduces situations where someone may be physically unsafe, has no legal rights, no privacy and no control over living space to 'housing need', which is a definition that the majority of academics, policy researchers and NGOs, alongside several European nations, do not accept (Busch-Geertsema, 2010). Another counterargument is another one we raise above, that populations on the streets and encampments are fluid, they not only move around a lot, they move in and out of different forms of homelessness and housing precarity (Culhane, 2018), whereas homemaking, whether consciously or unconsciously, leans towards a subset of this subset of homeless people, the long-term or chronically homeless population. By contrast, perhaps subconsciously, homemaking needs homelessness to be a steady state, at least in the sense that it has some, uninterrupted, duration. By these means the criteria governing whether or not people experiencing homelessness have the characteristics to exhibit homemaking grow rather narrow.

While homemaking may recognise the horrors of street homelessness and may try not to romanticise the 'glorious uncertainty' (Vincent *et al.*, 1993) of a homeless life outside mainstream society, the externally constructed imagery of 'homelessness' at the core of homemaking closely may be misconstrued as reflecting the idea that homelessness is mainly sin, partly sickness, but never a direct consequence of political decisions, or the way in which our economic or housing systems work. The radical intent of homemaking to offer a new epistemology of housing is compromised, because it may ultimately be based on transitory patterns of behaviour enacted by marginalised people who are defined as 'homeless' because of political-cultural imagery, rather than via analysis. Homemaking seeks to reconstruct homelessness, but it is built on a flawed image, on one fraction of the lived reality of homelessness, the fraction it is acceptable to recognise, because it can be (re)presented as the sin and sickness of individual pathology.

Turning to the cultural aspects of homemaking, again it can be seen that this is not a simple reassertion of old arguments that homelessness entraps people in a single, consistent subculture. However, homemaking does taxonomize, it sees pictures and patterns of behaviour that manifest as 'dwelling as difference'. Neale's (1997) core criticism of homelessness research still holds true today, that the reality of homelessness is varied and complex, so to suggest that a set idea of what 'homelessness' is, defined either as a collective, shared experience, or as a set of patterns of individual and structural intersections, has no conceptual utility. Homemaking, like so many attempts to retheorise homelessness before it, wanders into this conceptual trap, 'we have studied these homeless people, found X, therefore *all* homelessness is Y', homemaking may indeed elucidate aspects of homelessness, but it is demonstrably not about homelessness as a whole.

The point that previous reports of a distinct subculture of homelessness, such as shelterization, showed no resilience when faced by critical social scientific enquiry has been made. Earlier work that saw evidence of cultures or subcultures in homelessness disintegrated in the face of improvements in method, which found homelessness was

often ephemeral and shifts in perception, seeing adaptation to externally imposed structures and attitudes, rather than a culture. In essence, these criticisms reflect what can be said about homemaking itself, alongside concerns about how the analysis is framed, and which particular people it is focused upon, homemaking is ultimately an externally generated interpretation of behaviours that is explicable in other terms, such as adaptation.

The balance between the elective and the imposed within homemaking is also crucial. Perhaps there is a line after which the elective becomes so marginal, so transitory, that finding and ascribing real meaning to it becomes a challenge, i.e. homemaking may assume a level of control that is not there, or only exists occasionally.

We also need to be cognisant of the risks of imposing a 'culture', a 'weird exoskeleton' of any sort on the varieties of people experiencing homelessness, because we have made that mistake before and, equally, be careful about what we interpret as resistance. We need to be clear to distinguish between a practice nearly everyone engages in at some point in their lives, that of homemaking, with survival strategies designed to reduce the impact of homelessness. And finally, we need to be sure that we are not mistaking adaptations to the contingencies of day to day life with a home/house with something more.

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