The reticent state? Interpreting emergency responses to homelessness in Alberta, Canada

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Abstract

Historically, governmental responses to homelessness in Canada have defaulted to the most basic of services such as food and shelter. Even under exceptional circumstances, such as the current coronavirus pandemic, governments still demonstrate reluctance to guarantee permanent, adequate and affordable housing to all. In this policy review we argue that this pattern suggests that reticence is an apt term for describing homelessness responses in Canada and that this condition is rooted in the continued dominance of liberalism in Canadian society.

Introduction

In their article "Understanding responses to homelessness during COVID-19: An examination of Australia", Parsell et al. (2020) argue that, prior to the coronavirus pandemic, governmental responses to homelessness were characterized by a 'poverty of ambition': they defaulted to the most basic of services such as food and shelter and treated the homeless as flawed and deficient (see also Parsell 2018). These responses contradicted mounting evidence that the solution to homelessness—and the attendant health risks—is permanent affordable housing. Australia's response has changed dramatically with the onset of the pandemic. Homelessness is finally being treated as a public health crisis. But not, as Parsell et al. (2020) explain, because of the negative health outcomes people experience while unhoused; rather, it is because of the threat of contagion and the risk posed to the health of the general public. As the pandemic developed, the Australian government began to move homeless people into self-contained units, such as hotel or motel rooms. All behavioural conditions typically imposed on homeless individuals accessing shelter or housing were waived. The authors wager, however, that "the benefits [afforded] to people who are homeless will be retracted when the public health risks are no longer evident" (Parsell et al., 2020, 8). Therefore, despite the changes in homeless interventions necessitated by the pandemic, the 'poverty of ambition' will likely remain unchanged.

In this policy review, we extend the arguments of Parsell et al. (2020) by highlighting the structural reasons that explain why this 'poverty of ambition' prevails. Deeply rooted in countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States, this 'poverty of ambition' calls to mind what Peter Marcuse (2013, 36), writing in the late 1970s, called the "myth of the benevolent state," the false assumption that:

> government acts out of a primary concern for the welfare of all its citizens, that its policies represent an effort to find solutions to recognized social problems, and that government efforts fall short of complete success only because of lack of knowledge, countervailing selfish interests, incompetence, or lack of courage.

We argue that this myth warrants alternative conceptions of why governments fall short of success where knowledge, competence and courage are present but homelessness persists nonetheless. Our empirical focus is Alberta, Canada, a province which has displayed an ambition to end homelessness for more than a decade and has invested hundreds of millions of dollars into Housing First (HF) programming towards this end. But eliminating homelessness has proven elusive, as recent 'emergencies' (both the recurring emergency of exposure during severe winter weather, and the more exceptional case of COVID-19) lay bare.

In this paper we posit that these emergencies reveal a paradigmatic pattern accompanied by an underlying logic: doing the bare minimum to keep people experiencing homelessness alive and to minimize any disruption they may cause, while maintaining the status quo. To the optimist, this governmental logic could be seen to be redeemable if it could only address its 'poverty of ambition' by doing more than focus on survivability. However, to the cynic, this governmental logic is beyond redemption. It cannot operate but by design. At its core is a fundamental liberal code. Rather than benevolence hampered by a 'poverty of ambition,' we find reticence with a 'pretension towards progressiveness.' Critically, we argue that this 'reticent state' is brought into stark relief under emergency conditions, where the lives of people experiencing homelessness are directly threatened by exposure.

In what follows, we begin by unpacking what we mean by 'the reticent state,' using the framework of biopolitics to conceptualize its inner logic, a default towards restraint. While common readings of biopolitics might seem to presume a benevolent state, we suggest that when examined from the perspective of liberalism, state reticence is a much more fitting descriptor. We then apply this framework to the case of homelessness in Canada beginning with the framing of homelessness as a 'national disaster,' a social catastrophe that has become normalized, and ending with an analysis of two events in Edmonton, Alberta that exemplify homelessness as a permanent state of emergency. Specifically, we consider the threat of exposure due to severe winter temperatures and the threat of exposure to COVID-19. In so doing, we reveal the contours of the 'reticent state.'

The Benevolent State or the Reticent State?

Social protection is widely presumed to be the principal function of government; yet, it is difficult to reconcile this presumption with the persistence of homelessness in countries such as the United States, Australia and Canada, where government responses to poverty and housing insecurity default to means-tested and market-orientated solutions typifying what Esping-Anderson (1990) and other welfare theorists have called 'liberal welfare regimes.' Decades ago, analyses of such regimes led many to question the assumption that governments in wealthy countries prioritize the welfare of all citizens. In their seminal work, Piven and Cloward (1971) reframed 'welfare assistance' in the United States as a regulatory mechanism that functioned to maintain civil order and reinforce work norms. Historical analysis showed that income assistance for the very poor expanded during periods of turmoil and contracted when this turmoil subsided, nudging those expelled from welfare programs into low-wage labour. Reflecting on welfare assistance several decades later, Soss et al. (2011) contend that it continues to play a disciplinary role in 'governing the poor,' employing 'tough love' workfare programs to guard against welfare dependency. Framed in these terms, needs-based 21st century welfare state programs such as income assistance programs - the bedrock of the liberal

welfare regime - are not a function of benevolence; rather, they exist to discipline the poor, quell social disorder and minimize costs to public services.

Writing in 1978, Peter Marcuse (2013) challenged the 'myth' of the benevolent state in the context of housing policy in the United States. Marcuse (2013, 36) asked, "what state actions would one expect to find if there were, in fact, a housing policy evolving from the efforts of a benevolent state to solve existing problems?" One would expect to find, Marcuse (2013, 40) postulated, "an evolution of sophistication and effectiveness in dealing with the problems of bad housing." However, his inspection of U.S. housing policy found little evidence for this. Instead, seemingly benevolent state actions, such as housing regulations and public housing schemes, were justified in terms of the prevention of social disorder and the maintenance of private profit, rather than the welfare of its most vulnerable citizens.

The takeaway is that in a liberal welfare regime, the provision of means-tested income assistance and public shelter is in no way indicative of benevolence: rather, these function together to ensure survivability while simultaneously regulating the working class and maintaining the existing social order. If not benevolent, then, what kind of governmental logic are we dealing with?

The framework of 'biopolitics' offers one theoretical response to this question. Biopolitical theory draws attention to the linkage between the welfare of populations and their regulation and control (Blencowe 2012). The term 'biopolitics' was coined to describe the historical formation of governmental practices around modern scientific expertise and related population norms. Foucault (2008, 318), one of the originators of the concept, defined biopolitics as "the attempt, starting from the eighteenth century, to rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic as a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birth rate, life expectancy, race… ." Foucault's (2007, 2008) genealogies of biopolitics focused on Western Europe and the United States and showed how governing came, over the course of the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, to be

rationalized in relation to the biological reality of population and, importantly, the political economy of liberalism.

Since then, liberalism has served as a powerful political rationality guiding governmental practices targeting the welfare of the population (Foucault 2008). Governing has been steered by the belief that this welfare is best secured through the freedom of individuals and the market, realms *that exist as a function of limited government* (Rose 1999). At the core of biopolitical modes of governing in liberal contexts is a productive tension: the vitality of the population is secured through the freedom of its members and the very existence of this freedom is dependent upon government self-restraint. Given this core feature, to be most effective the state must be 'reticent,' intervening only when absolutely necessary and, in the process, managing rather than eliminating insecurity, all in the name of individual autonomy and market efficiency.

For the reticent state to function, however, this productive tension between freedom and security must operate on the basis of a third category: property. Under liberalism, security is a function of *independence in relation to property* (Lorey 2015). Property in this instance encompasses both one's own body as well as commodities such as housing. In this regard, property has long been conceived as the primary means to security under liberalism: to lack property is to lack security. Hence the principal role of poor relief within a liberal welfare regime: to activate individual independence vis-à-vis property – be it in terms of selling one's labour-power in the job market or entering tenancy in the rental market – so as to enhance the security of the individual independent of the state. The reticent state, therefore, steps in to activate these 'powers of freedom' (Rose 1999), albeit coercively, when and where property is lacking.

From this biopolitical perspective, the 'minimum safeguards' extended to populations lacking property – such as means-tested income assistance and emergency shelter – operate to encourage independence by offering only the most basic level of protection. On one hand, the

minimumness of these safeguards (i.e. poverty-level income assistance and temporary shelter) reproduce the Victorian principle of 'less eligibility': that relief must be made less attractive than the most basic wages or dwelling so as to prevent social dependence and induce participation in paid labour and the private rental market. On the other hand, the protective dimensions of minimum *safeguards* (i.e. provision of basic necessities for life) prevent death, the occurrence of which would jeopardize state legitimacy. Hence, in this fashion, minimum safeguards occupy a central role in the reticent state: they establish where government responsibility begins (i.e. survivability) while ensuring individual freedom and responsibility still exist.

In countries like Canada, a liberal welfare regime, these minimum safeguards exist to preserve life reduced to its barest form while simultaneously guarding against dependence, the enemy of independence and market efficiency. As a result, the experience of homelessness is reduced to mere survivability on the basis of a local 'safety net' knitted together from means-tested income assistance and local emergency shelter systems, now a highly professionalized sector. While these interventions may be well intended, they are not exemplary of what Parsell and Watts (2017) call 'effective altruism'; that is, they do not effectively end homelessness, nor provide long-term or structural solutions to the issue of housing deprivation. Beyond these minimum safeguards, a pretension towards progressiveness has resulted in some partial exceptions, most notably HF, which siphons off and re-houses the heaviest users of services (Baker & Evans, 2016). Nonetheless, a majority of people experiencing homelessness circulate between the shelter system, cheap rental housing and accommodation with friends and family where they can wait years for subsidized, social housing. A biopolitical perspective draws attention to how these minimum safeguards, and even HF, are indicative of the reticent state, which operates through the mutual constitution of property relations, individual freedom, and emergency measures. These interlocking elements constitute the governmental logic behind the paradigmatic response to homelessness in Canada, a response we label 'disaster management.' Disaster management intervenes after the event of homelessness through

emergency measures that provide temporary relief and rehabilitation. We explore this paradigm in the following two sections.

Responding to Homelessness in Canada: The Paradigm of Disaster Management

Today, homelessness is widely recognized as a crisis in Canada; however, this crisis, and its recognition, is anything but a recent or new event (Gaetz 2010). Rather, homelessness is a longstanding reality in Canada and has been recognized as an issue for nearly 40 years. Faith groups and non-profit organizations have been responding to the needs of people experiencing homelessness for decades (Hulchanski et al. 2009). Moreover, it has been 23 years since the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC 1998) called upon all levels of government to declare homelessness a 'national disaster,' requiring humanitarian relief.

This 'national disaster' was largely the result of neoliberal processes of welfare state restructuring at both federal and provincial levels. This restructuring began in the early 1980s with cuts to federal funding of social housing. In 1993, federal spending was reduced even further. Shortly after, in 1996, the federal government devolved responsibility for federally-owned social housing to the provinces (Hulchanski et al. 2009). Under this new regime the share of subsidized housing in the housing system steadily declined (Suttor 2016). This welfare state restructuring exacerbated poverty and housing insecurity, laying the groundwork for mass homelessness and the responses that followed in communities and provinces across Canada in the decades that followed.

While the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee's choice of words was meant to inspire action, their framing of homelessness as a 'national disaster' is revealing in another way: it exemplifies the systemic tendency towards disaster management in homelessness policy in Canada, particularly its emphasis on risk mitigation, emergency response and recovery (Alexander 2002). Initially, the response in Canada was organized at a grassroots level as faith groups, non-profit organizations, and municipal governments expanded temporary emergency shelters and drop-in centres to meet the immediate needs of the rapidly growing homeless

population (Gaetz 2010). These local efforts came to be supported and coordinated by a re-engaged federal government which unveiled a national response to homelessness beginning in 1999. Initially called the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI), and later re-branded the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), these federal programs established direct relationships between the Canadian government and local communities in an effort to steer homelessness programming towards best practices (Gaetz 2010).

The NHI/HPS was a critical juncture that shaped the contemporary Canadian landscape of homelessness in ways that are consistent with a disaster management approach. First, it facilitated the expansion of emergency shelter capacity by providing capital funding for shelter infrastructure in the early 2000s. In 2001, the census counted 14,150 individuals in shelters (Hurtibise et al. 2009). By 2016, this number had grown to 22,190 individuals (McDermott et al. 2019). Second, amidst this 'shelterization' of the homeless population, and the increasing visibility of the chronically homeless within shelter environments, the HPI later encouraged the implementation of HF interventions. HF seeks to rapidly re-house the chronically homeless in private-market apartments with case management support. The uptake of HF in Canada was further encouraged when the HPI made federal funding contingent upon the implementation of the HF model (Gaetz et al. 2013).

At provincial and municipal levels, responses to homelessness have come to be framed in relation to the progressive goal of ending homelessness using the HF approach (Gaetz 2010). Across the country, many municipalities and provinces adopted 10-year plans to end homelessness in the early 2000s, beginning in Alberta where the provincial government introduced "A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years" in 2008 (Evans and Masuda 2020). Baker and Evans (2016, 32) suggest that at the level of individual programs, HF reflects socially progressive ideals, "providing highly vulnerable people with immediate access to permanent accommodation without the onerous, moralising conditions that have been favoured in the past." However, HF is also constituted within a broader context of welfare retrenchment and fiscal austerity. This is manifest in HF's focus on a fraction of the homeless

population (approximately 10%) who, by virtue of long-term homelessness and complex needs, impose the highest costs on public systems. As a political-ideological intervention, HF is premised on the potential fiscal savings that accrue from providing this group with housing and supports. Alongside these practices of targeting and costing is an analytic focus on the individual pathologies (rather than structural inequalities) thought to give rise to chronic homelessness. Hennigan (2017) extends this critique, noting that HF works to reintegrate chronically homeless individuals into the housing market, which in turn directs case management towards producing disciplined clients who can sustain tenancies. Thus, while there are progressive elements to HF, the model is consistent with a state that intervenes minimally (through targeting), acts out of perceived necessity (to reduce wasteful social spending), and co-opts the market in addressing social problems (through reliance on private apartments).

The 10-year plans in Alberta and elsewhere have come to an end and while significant success has been achieved in moving thousands of individuals out of chronic homelessness into housing there still remains a visible homelessness crisis. Despite investing in HF programing, homelessness remains deeply ingrained in Canadian society and the emergency shelter system is larger than it has ever been. In 2016, it was estimated that approximately 235,000 Canadians experience some form of homelessness each year (Gaetz et al. 2016). In 2018, it was estimated that 25,216 people across 61 communities experienced absolute homelessness in shelters or unsheltered locations (Government of Canada 2019). Moreover, homelessness is increasingly racialized: out of those individuals surveyed in 2018, nearly one third (30%) of respondents identified as Indigenous (approximately 5% of the Canadian population identified as Indigenous in the 2016 census) (Government of Canada 2019).

Despite knowing more about homelessness than ever before, and investing in 'progressive' solutions, homelessness remains entrenched in every large Canadian city. It has become a permanent state of managed insecurity – a chronic disaster – experienced by the most economically and socially marginalized members of Canadian society. The very

survivability of people experiencing homelessness is mediated through a disaster management system that rests upon provincially administered, means-tested income assistance programs that provide individuals with the bare minimum of financial support. In most cases, income assistance is insufficient to obtain both housing and food at adequate levels (Laidley and Aldridge 2020), and given the chronic shortage of subsidized housing in Canada, individuals turn to either friends and family or resort to emergency shelters operated by municipalities and non-profits. According to the last Canadian census, 54.1% of shelter residents were recipients of income assistance (McDermott et al. 2019). Those judged as the most vulnerable may be fast-tracked for supported housing via HF. Those judged not vulnerable enough, wait months, often years, for subsidized housing. The next section examines how these lives are managed on the threshold of survivability amidst this social catastrophe.

Emergency Measures and the Threat of Exposure

Looking closely at Alberta, the survival of the most precarious and insecure is managed through the ongoing deployment of emergency responses, not unlike those organized in response to natural disasters. In this sense, measures are taken to ensure that risk is mitigated, the basic needs of 'victims' are met and suffering is minimized (Morris 2020). In Edmonton, Alberta (2020 population: 1.0 million), the risk of exposure is paramount. Two exposure scenarios demand attention: (a) the seasonal occurrence of dangerously low temperatures and (b) the recent appearance of COVID-19. Both cases focus upon the threat of exposure while also reaffirming the centrality of minimum safeguards in the governance of homelessness. In doing so they provide further glimpses into the liberal contours of the reticent state.

Winter Emergency Response

Edmonton spends 180 days a year with temperatures below freezing, including 25 days with a minimum temperature below -20°C (Government of Canada, 2017). Consequently, it is no exaggeration to say that homelessness in Edmonton is a life-or-death concern, particularly in the winter months. In February 2019, most of Canada, as well as much of the midwest and

north-east of the United States, experienced severe cold weather as Arctic air normally trapped above the pole spilled into lower latitudes. This prompted widespread extreme cold warnings, with temperatures dropping below -30°C (and below -40°C with windchill) in many areas. One of the population groups most vulnerable to these conditions are people experiencing homelessness.

There are some practices in place in Edmonton to safeguard the homeless population, most recently estimated at 1,971 persons (7 Cities, 2018), from extremely cold weather. These responses include warming buses, extended shelter hours, and most notably a Winter Emergency Response (WER) Protocol, developed by a cross-sectoral committee including Edmonton Police Service, Edmonton Transit Service (ETS), Alberta Health Services, and local homeless serving agencies. The protocol emphasizes two key functions: "the need to be prepared for additional emergency shelter space" and "coordination when needed to mitigate risk of having anyone turned away from shelters during the extreme cold" (Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2018, np).

There are two primary components of the protocol. The first is concerned with qualifications for increasing shelter space or opening other indoor public spaces to homeless populations. Edmonton's WER protocol is triggered ("enacted") when two conditions are met: the temperature is predicted to be below -20°C (including windchill) all day *and* "there has been an identified trend over the past several days that shelters may reach capacity" (Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2018, np). The protocol then allows for three potential courses of action: "[1] Increase current shelter capacity with overflow dollars allocated for Winter Emergency Response, [2] Identify other appropriate and available shelter spaces to increase shelter capacity, [3] Connect with ETS on the utilization of their emergency response" (Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2018, np). Effectively, the -20°C threshold combined with a calculation of shelter use functions as a switch for additional funding to allow shelters to access overflow spaces and to engage with ETS about the public spaces it operates (such as underground light rail transit (LRT) stations). While additional shelter spaces are described as "appropriate and

available," there is no discussion of what constitutes appropriate. For example, underground LRT stations have been utilized as emergency shelter spaces but they are not insulated, heated buildings - rather, they are tunnels with a handful of overhead heat lamps.

The second component of the WER Protocol is a risk-assessment tool intended for service providers who are in a position to decide whether to turn away a client during periods of extremely cold weather (again classified as below -20°C). It presents a two-step process for identifying and responding to risk in this circumstance. First, service providers are directed to consider factors that increase an individual's risk, such as intoxication, mental health issues, and accessibility factors (including mobility impairments and distance to other services). A level of risk can then be assigned to the individual, as shown by the examples in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 here]

The second step involves determining the "appropriate response." These responses range from suspending some shelter policies (e.g. capacity restrictions, individual bans, intoxication rules) in order to accommodate individuals, up to calling emergency medical or police services, depending on the level of risk: "low risk" warrants substantial changes in shelter operating practices; "moderate risk" suggests coordinated "hand-offs" or transfers of clients between agencies; "high-risk" involves calling 911, and specifying that it is a "winter emergency response" is advised. The term "low-risk" is somewhat confusing in this context as the situation has already been defined as an emergency due to climatic factors.

COVID-19 Response

In response to the threat of COVID-19, on March 23, 2020, the City of Edmonton opened two emergency shelters. The first was a drop-in shelter and COVID-19 isolation site (CBC News, March 23), and the second was a 180-bed shelter located in a closed recreation centre for individuals without COVID-19 symptoms (CBC News, March 26). These services were funded

largely by the $25 million pledged by the provincial government to support homeless people in Alberta during the pandemic (Knight, 2020).

However, both shelters closed while the pandemic was still ongoing. The drop-in services at the first shelter ceased in late July, with the isolation unit only remaining operational until mid-August (CBC News, August 1). Similarly, the shelter located in the recreation centre was closed when the facility was reopened to the public. Notably, the drop-in shelter space was closed at the end of July due to the provincial state of emergency being lifted and due to an exhaustion of funds allocated by the province (CBC News, August 1), *not* because Edmonton saw a reduction in COVID-19 cases. In fact, cases in the city were more than two times higher when the shelters closed than when they initially opened ("COVID-19 Alberta Statistics", 2020).

Following the closures of these shelters, there were three major developments with regards to Edmonton's COVID-19 emergency response. First, on July 24, Camp Pekiwewin—an Indigenous-led prayer and resistance camp—formed on a field in the Rossdale neighbourhood; itself a significant site of ceremony, gathering, and burial for Indigenous peoples living in Edmonton (Camp Pekiwewin, 2020, July 25). This encampment formed in response to the inadequate supports provided to homeless populations in Edmonton in the midst of the pandemic. At its largest, Pekiwewin accommodated 170 tent homes (Camp Pekiwewin, 2020). The supports offered on-site included meal services, first aid, naloxone delivery, among many others (Camp Pekiwewin, 2020; Treaty 6 Outreach, 2020, November 3). During its first 90 days of operation, Pekiwewin reversed 70 overdoses, meaning the camp effectively doubled as a safe consumption site (PekiwewinYEG, 2020, October 22). Notably, Pekiwewin received no monetary support from municipal, provincial, or federal governments, and was sustained through mutual aid.

Second, in August, Alberta's provincial government dedicated another $48 million to expand shelter capacity during the pandemic (Krugel, 2020) and on August 28th, Mayor Don Iveson announced a '10-Week Plan to End Homelessness'. This Plan was a reaction to the lack

of support available to Edmonton's homeless population, as well as the 11th anniversary of the City's HF-led '10-Year Plan to End Homelessness'. The core components of the '10-Week Plan' were as follows: increased bridge housing; more financial support from the province; and a 24/7 shelter at the previously closed drop-in site (Rendell-Watson, 2020; Iveson, 2020). The 24/7 shelter was designed to include a safe consumption site, laundry services, showers, Indigenous and youth support services, and day programming. However, it was not intended to be permanent, and was slated to close in March 2021. It is also important to note that even if every component of the Plan was to have been fully realized, it would not 'end homelessness' in Edmonton, as accessing emergency shelter is included in the Canadian definition of homelessness (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2017).

In preparation for another cold Edmonton winter combined with the threat of COVID-19, new shelter space and bridge housing began to open in late October and early November 2020, including the opening of the 24/7 shelter mentioned above. Two other emergency shelters were also opened for the duration of winter (Riebe, 2020; Rendell-Watson, 2020). Although these new shelters represent a substantive improvement to the ways in which homelessness is typically governed during Edmonton winters, it is important to note that these spaces do not constitute stable housing, and cannot 'end homelessness' as the 10-Week Plan promises.

Finally, as a part of the '10-Week Plan to End Homelessness', the City converted jockey dormitories at the City's former racetrack into bridge housing at a capital cost of $600,000 plus the additional cost of $1.2 million dollars for operations (CTV News, May 27). These dormitories were designed to provide 36-78 individuals a place to stabilize and search for housing after a spell of homelessness and were intended for stays of 30-90 days (CTV News, May 27). In addition, 98 rooms were rented using funds from the Federal government in a vacant hotel outside of the downtown core, and were designated as temporary residence for homeless individuals (CBC News, October 8).

In early November, Pekiwewin officially halted operations. In an official statement released to their Instagram, Pekiwewin organizers voiced their disappointment with the shelters described above (Pekiwewin, 2020, October 30). Although the City of Edmonton has drastically expanded their homelessness response in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and significant pressure from Edmontonians—especially Pekiwewin residents and organizers—these efforts fell significantly short of 'ending homelessness', given the reliance on shelters that at best mitigate its impacts. As such, they exemplify the "disaster management merry-go-round" (Bosher et al. 2021, 3): a cyclical process of actions that reduce impacts but fail to prevent the disastrous event from recurring.

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite displaying some 'progressive' traits, such as HF, on the whole Canada has been reticent to do more than the bare minimum to address homelessness, even under extreme and exceptional conditions such as in the depths of winter and a pandemic. This is not, to quote Marcuse (2013, 36), due to "lack of knowledge, countervailing selfish interests, incompetence, or lack of courage". It is due, we argue, to a deeper 'genetic' programming, what Foucault and others have called a 'liberal biopolitics.' The ideology of liberalism inhibits state ambitions. The resultant reticent state acts only when it absolutely has to through disaster management responses that reduce the problem of homelessness to the mere survivability of unhoused people and employs emergency measures to this end. Doing so does not prevent further disaster, hence the cycle continues.

The contours of this reticent state are brought into stark relief under these conditions. Canada's response to homelessness reminds us that the survivability of people experiencing homelessness is dependent upon the most minimal of safeguards that are temporary and conditional and thus have a double function. Means-tested income assistance and emergency shelter – both vestiges of 19th century welfare regimes – provide the most basic necessities to ensure survival. Simultaneously, the very inadequacy of these measures compels recipients into

liberal circuits of security: selling labour-power for minimum wage and entering tenancy in low-cost market housing.

The symbolic significance of Camp Pekiwewin crystalizes in relation to these ethical contours: this site of resistance briefly upended the poverty management apparatus by introducing *an alternative form of security*, based on an ethic of care, solidarity and community ownership (Camp Pekiwewin, 2020). This alternative was tenuous and only temporary. On November 8, 2020 closure notices were posted at the encampment and Edmonton police and city staff began relocating people, some into supportive housing, some into temporary bridge housing or hotels, and others into the traditional shelter system. Here we find the very opposite of a benevolent state. Rather than generous and universal solutions to homelessness that go beyond basic survival - such as legally enforceable, individualistic rights to housing, a universal basic income, and an adequate supply of affordable housing - we find interventions directed towards 'target populations' operating in conjunction with the police, the private rental market and the rather durable local welfare matrix of temporary shelter and subsistence-level income assistance.

Having sketched some of the contours of the reticent state it is clear that liberal biopolitics places limits on state ambitions in Canada. Thus, ending homelessness will necessitate a biopolitical reprogramming of the state itself. It will require breaking free from the formulation of classical liberalism which has only intensified under neoliberalism and which has manifested the disaster management paradigm described above. Under such conditions, personal security is contingent upon the exercise of individual freedom in relation to property, understood in terms of labour and housing. Only when and where property is lacking and life is in jeopardy does the reticent state break its oath to self-limitation and intervene to securitize unhoused people's lives through emergency measures.

Alternatives to the reticent state and its systemic tendency towards disaster management can be constructed by breaking the linkage between security, property and

freedom. If staying within the bounds of capitalism, a shift towards a social democratic welfare state arrangement built upon universality and the promotion of equality through a redistributive, rather than emergency-based, social security system is necessary. Moreover, by thinking about freedom beyond notions of autonomy and independence it becomes, as Sen (2009) has persuasively argued, the ability to live the life one desires. A reprogramming of the reticent state might begin in a similar way by rationalizing the politics of life in relation to these alternative notions of human freedom and security.

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