



**Bringing Home the Housing Crisis: Domicide and
Precarity in Inner London**

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Melanie Nowicki, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MN' or 'MD' with a stylized flourish.

Dated: 24/08/2017

Abstract

This thesis explores the impact of United Kingdom Coalition/Conservative government housing policies on inner London's low-income residents. It focuses specifically on the bedroom tax (a social housing reform introduced in 2013) and the criminalisation of squatting in a residential building (introduced in 2012) as case studies. These link to, and contribute towards, three main areas of scholarly and policy interest. First is the changing nature of welfare in the UK, and the relationship between social disadvantage and policy rhetoric in shaping public attitudes towards squatters and social tenants. Second, the thesis initiates better understanding of what impact the policies have made on the homelives of squatters and social tenants, and on housing segregation and affordability more broadly. Third, it highlights the multifaceted ways in which different squatters and social tenants protest and resist the two policies. Methodologically, the thesis is based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with squatters, social tenants affected by the bedroom tax, and multiple stakeholders, including housing association employees, housing solicitors and local councillors. Critical discourse analysis was also employed in order to analyse rhetoric surrounding the two policies. This involved the analysis of political speeches and news articles. Conceptually, the thesis argues for the centrality of critical geographies of home in its analysis and does so through the concepts of domicide, home unmaking, and precarity in order to understand the home as a complex and fluid part of both the lifecourse and wider social politics. The thesis concludes by arguing that the two policies are ultimately class-based ideological moralisations of the home, rather than necessary pragmatic decisions based on a need for austerity. This is particularly prevalent in the context of a now-ubiquitous understanding of London's housing market as 'in crisis'. I argue that precarious housing circumstances are not unavoidable conditions of austerity, or that austerity itself is inevitable. Rather, precarity is ideologically enforced on particular groups of citizens on the basis that they are less deserving of home.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

In the early hours of the morning on Wednesday 14th June 2017, a fire broke out on the fourth floor of Grenfell Tower, a 24-storey high-rise residential block in north Kensington, London. Residents trapped in the tower were advised by the fire services to 'stay put' in their flats and await help, the expectation being that residents would be safest in their homes as the fire was assumed to be containable (Halliday 2017). However, as the night progressed it became clear that this was not the case, with the fire spreading at an unprecedented speed, trapping hundreds of residents in their homes as the flames spread across all 24 floors. The fire raged until the early hours of the following day. At the time of writing, 80 residents are presumed to have died in the blaze, with fears that the death toll is only set to increase (40 residents remain unaccounted for) (BBC 2017). The cause of the fire's rapid spread was quickly identified as being due to the cladding that had been installed to the exterior of the building a few years earlier. It emerged that the cladding, which has been applied to hundreds of residential (including my own former family home) and public buildings such as schools, was highly flammable, as well as creating cavities in the building that cause a chimney effect. This combination of factors is believed to have enabled the fire to sweep up through the building at high speed (BBC 2017). Several years earlier, Kensington and Chelsea council had made the decision to apply cheap, flammable cladding to Grenfell Tower in order to save around £300,000 in refurbishment costs.

Grenfell residents had warned of the dangers of the cladding to no avail, and it was revealed in the aftermath of the fire that a local blogger had been threatened with legal action by the local authority, who accused him of defamation and harassment (Roberts 2017). What was initially understood to be a tragic accident was rapidly revealed to be the

consequence of local authority and central government negligence, with the Metropolitan Police considering manslaughter, health and safety and fire safety charges in the criminal investigation that has been opened in its aftermath (BBC 2017). Both central and local government responses to the fire have been overwhelmingly inadequate. Residents and the press have since been banned from local authority meetings, and hundreds of displaced residents remain in temporary accommodation, despite Prime Minister Theresa May's promise that all residents affected would be re-housed within three weeks.

Grenfell Tower is the amalgamation of the decades-long neglect of London's poorest citizens. It is a horrific outcome of layer upon layer of policy and rhetoric that demarcates the worth of citizens' lives based on their housing tenure and socio-economic background (Madden 2017). It is the unbearably tragic consequence of particular governance practices that deem the lives of low-income people as lacking in economic and social value, and therefore unworthy of secure and liveable homes. Such neglect of Grenfell Tower and its residents reveals an approach to governance and housing that views the worth of life as hierarchical: that, to draw on the work of Judith Butler, some lives are more grievable than others (Butler 2009). Those deemed to be on the lower rungs of society therefore do not elicit much in the way of concern regarding access to safe and secure housing, as they are understood to have done little to deserve such access. This is a form of domicide, meaning the intentional destruction of home (Porteous and Smith 2001), whereby the intentional neglect of safety measures in Grenfell Tower has ultimately contributed to the violent destruction of hundreds of homes.

.....

Around four and a half years earlier, I heard two stories that first highlighted to me the grossly unjust way in which policymaking

penalises and demonises people based on where they call home, particularly in relation to their housing tenure (or lack thereof).

When visiting my aunt's for dinner one evening, I was shocked to hear that she was going to become subject to something called 'the bedroom tax', whereby because she is a social tenant in receipt of housing benefit, she was suddenly going to lose a quarter of her housing benefit payment every month because she had two unoccupied rooms in her flat. She was extremely anxious about this upcoming policy change, and had no idea where she was going to find the money to cover all of her rent. She hadn't worked for several years due to chronic physical and mental health conditions, and was understandably reluctant to either move from the flat she had lived in for almost all her life, or to have strangers renting out her rooms.

Later that week I bumped into an old school friend at a party. When I asked what he had been up to since school, he told me that he had squatted for many years in south London, having become involved in a local socialist group, enjoying putting empty buildings back into use and saving money on rent while he studied. However, that had all come to an end for him, as the government had recently criminalised squatting in a residential building. He told me that the law change had made it too difficult and too risky for him to continue squatting. He said he was lucky that he had plenty of friends and family in London, and was able to remain in the city, but that friends he had squatted with had had little choice but to leave the capital, as rent was too expensive to maintain and their jobs too low-paying and precarious.

Both of these incidents struck me as appalling in a socio-political climate that is defined by housing crisis, particularly in London. This crisis is framed both in terms of lack of supply, and the unaffordability of the housing that does exist. The two policies felt paradoxical to me: why would the government introduce legislation that reduces people's housing options at a time when we are constantly told that housing availability is in crisis? I felt compelled to explore the issue more, and

decided to pursue a research topic that explored the impacts of these two policies that had so negatively affected people around me. I hoped to gain from a doctorate an understanding of how and why these policies had been brought into being by Cameron's Coalition government¹, and if and how people were challenging and resisting them, and to what extent these challenges had been successful.

This thesis therefore focuses on the impact of the criminalisation of squatting (section 144 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012)² and the bedroom tax (officially termed the 'removal of the spare room subsidy') on squatters and social tenants. However, the stories told and questions raised throughout this thesis also speak to a wider set of malign governance practices that denounce London's lower-income citizens, and in particular those that are not seen to subscribe to aspirations of homeownership, as worthless. I began this thesis with an account of the Grenfell Tower fire as it is a highly visceral, tragic and enraging example of the consequences of multiple layers of neglect, of dismissal, and of the denigration of some of London's most vulnerable communities. Through this thesis, I hope to contribute to a call for accountability, and a demand for justice for the generations of Londoners who have been discounted by governance practices that denounce their very rights to home, in part on the basis of their housing tenure.

Unaffordability and the insecurity of housing in London is continually portrayed to us as a crisis borne out of the 2007/8 financial crash: as an unavoidable outcome of the Labour government's economic irresponsibility. We are told that more housing is not being built because no-one can afford to build them, that affordable housing is not financially viable (London Assembly 2013; Bloomfield 2017). That this crisis is a

¹ A coalition of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties that came about as a consequence of a hung parliament in the wake of the 2010 general election. The Coalition government remained in power until 2015, when David Cameron's Conservative Party regained a majority in parliament.

² Throughout the remainder of the thesis, 'section 144' refers to the criminalisation of squatting.

moment in time, and that once we have balanced the national books through a programme of years-long austerity measures housebuilding levels and affordability will improve. However, as Madden and Marcuse (2016) astutely note, to call current housing conditions one of crisis is inherently misleading. What we are seeing take place in London, and countless other cities across the globe, is not an acute housing crisis, but rather the normalisation of housing precarity for select groups of citizens for the purposes of financial and political gains. As they note:

Housing crisis is a predictable, consistent outcome of a basic characteristic of capitalist spatial development: housing is not distributed for the purposes of dwelling for all; it is produced and distributed as a commodity to enrich the few. Housing crisis is not a result of the system breaking down but of the system working as it intended (Madden and Marcuse 2016: 10).

This thesis is in part a consolidation of this argument. I argue that section 144 and the bedroom tax are not a necessary consequence of a housing crisis. Rather, they are deliberate attempts to undermine, and ultimately eradicate, the legitimacy of forms of housing that are not in keeping with neoliberal ideals of housing as a source of profit and financial investment. In short, they seek to precaritise the housing circumstances of particular citizens: a targeted housing crisis that dismantles low and no-income citizens' very right to secure and maintain a home.

This thesis therefore explores these issues around the normalisation of precarious housing through understanding how political rhetoric and policy in practice actively dismantle rights to home for those who are already some of the city's most vulnerable and precariously housed citizens. The concept of home is central to my analysis, and I argue that we cannot fully assess the causes and impacts of, and potential solutions to, the precaritisation of housing and the demonisation of low-income citizens without an acknowledgement of the central role of home. Home is an integral site through which our personal and collective identities

are constructed, a site of potential comfort, of alienation, of safety, of fear (Blunt and Dowling 2006)³. My exploration of section 144 and the bedroom tax is in part an account of what happens when rights to home are denied and the home intentionally destroyed, a process termed 'domicide' by Porteous and Smith in their seminal work on the subject (2001).

It should be noted that, although clearly interconnected terms, in the context of this thesis *home* should not be conflated with *housing*. Housing refers to the material dwelling, with housing studies traditionally concerned primarily with the economics of housing markets. *Home*, however, relates to a much more expansive, more emotive set of ideas. Home can vary drastically in scale, from dwelling, to nation, and beyond. It can refer to the material (e.g. dwelling), or a broader set of feelings, for example of security and familiarity. Although widely understood as an inherently positive space, the home can equally be imbued with precarity, violence, and loss (Brickell 2012b). Although this thesis is concerned with the impact of two housing policies, what is most profound and far reaching about section 144 and the bedroom tax are the implications they have regarding peoples' rights to *home*. As this research attests, the destruction and denial of ones' home and, perhaps most importantly of all, a socio-political climate that deems particular people not deserving of home at all, moves beyond issues connected to housing alone. This thesis does not solely tell the story of a perceived crisis in the housing system, but also of a socio-political crisis, in which those deemed to be undesirable and unproductive citizens are stripped of the basic right to home: to feel secure, to feel safe, to feel that they belong. How the home is both experienced by individuals and constructed in policy rhetoric has wide-reaching political implications, determining human value through the idealisation of some homes, and the dismissal of others. In short, home matters.

Whilst rights to the city have long been theorised in the social sciences (Lefebvre 2014; Mitchell 2003), and formed the basis of much urban activism, less attention has been paid to legal, social and cultural rights

to home and home life. Just as our ability to shape the urban landscape is fundamental to our experience of and wellbeing within the city, so too is our ability to construct, secure and maintain a home integral to our ability to live fulfilling lives. This thesis is a recounting of what happens when the home becomes a perpetual site of precarity for those, such as social tenants and squatters, whose lives are already precarious. It also considers what happens when social tenants and squatters not only see their homes further precaritised, but are concurrently reframed as undeserving of secure homes at all through an ongoing process of the demonisation of citizens based in large part on their tenure status.

The remainder of this chapter provides further context for the research, situating the project both conceptually and politically, before concluding with an outline of the thesis.

Situating the research conceptually and politically

The two case studies at the centre of this research, section 144 and the bedroom tax, contribute to three main areas of scholarly and policy interest that form the basis of the thesis structure. First is the changing

³ The concept of home and its integral position within my analysis will be explored in more detail both later in this chapter, and in Chapter 3.

nature of welfare in the UK, and the relationship between social disadvantage and policy rhetoric in shaping public attitudes towards squatters and social tenants. Second, the thesis initiates better understanding of what impact the policies have made on the homelives of squatters and social tenants, and on housing segregation and affordability more broadly. Third, it highlights the multifaceted ways in which different squatters and social tenants protest and resist the two policies. Using a qualitative methodological approach, I explore these areas of enquiry through a multi-stranded methodological approach. Twenty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted with a variety of participants, ranging from squatters and social tenants affected by the bedroom tax, to housing association employees and housing activists. I also conducted critical discourse analysis in order to examine political speeches and media articles. This method was utilised in order to highlight the powerful rhetoric employed in socio-political discourse in relation to the home. Political ethnography also emerged as a third methodological strand during the research process. This came about as a consequence of my growing involvement in housing activism, and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Conceptually, the thesis is grounded in a critical geographies of home perspective. Throughout, I examine the ways in which section 144 and the bedroom tax function as methods of intimate governance, in which squatters and social tenants are constructed as degenerate citizens through the site of the homespace. The thesis also analyses the ways in which the home is increasingly precaritised through policy by multi-layered and multifaceted means, further compounding precarity into every facet of squatters' and social tenants' lifeworlds. At its core, this research seeks to understand the ways in which the home interacts with both the individual lifecourse and wider social politics and governance practices. I do so by positing three key research questions, which form the basis for Chapters 5-8:

1. How are squatters and social tenants socially constructed in political rhetoric, and what effect has this had on the implementation of the bedroom tax and the criminalisation of squatting?
2. What have the impacts of section 144 and the bedroom tax been on squatters and social tenants?
3. How have squatters, affected social tenants and other stakeholders challenged and resisted the policies?

‘The bedroom tax’ vs ‘the removal of the spare room subsidy’: A side note regarding terminology

Throughout the thesis, I refer to the policy officially titled the ‘removal of the spare room subsidy’ as ‘the bedroom tax’. Early on in the doctoral process, I was asked to present an overview of my research plans to peers and senior academics in the Geography department at Royal Holloway. During the question and answer session at the end of my presentation, a colleague asked why I was using the term ‘bedroom tax’ rather than the policy’s official title, and questioned whether my use of the colloquial term might be overly politically loaded. His comment gave me pause for thought. Prior to that moment, I had been referring to the policy as the bedroom tax without thinking through why this was or whether it was appropriate in the context of the research.

Initially I decided that perhaps I should omit from referring to the policy by its colloquial name as a way of positioning myself as a relatively impartial researcher. However, it quickly emerged during the research process and in my subsequent writing that I was far from impartial on the subject. The stories of hardship I heard from participants as a consequence of the policy’s implementation, and the influx of statistics and research that showed the disproportionate affect it has had on single parents and people with disabilities quickly cemented my understanding

of the policy as inherently unjust. As is made clear throughout the thesis, my engagement with the bedroom tax is not concerned solely with understanding the legacy that foregrounded its implementation, its impact on residents, and the ways in which it is resisted and responded to. It is also, and perhaps most importantly, a critique of the policy's very existence. If I had chosen to refer to the policy as the 'removal of the spare room subsidy', I feel that I would in some way have betrayed my participants and the stories they had entrusted me with: that my use of a neutrally phrased and un-emotive term would have in part hidden the highly invasive and distressing impacts of the policy. I also argue that although it is technically not a form of taxation, the bedroom tax acts in much the same way, reducing income and funding governance. Finally, the term 'bedroom tax' elucidates what the 'removal of the spare room subsidy' does not: that the policy is a highly invasive infiltration into one of the most intimate areas of social tenants' home lives. It outlines who social tenants should be sharing their beds with, how they should be using the rooms in their homes, and how much space each member of their household should be taking up. It is intimate governance writ large, constructing the bounds of 'good citizenship' through the bedroom, something that its official title goes no way towards encapsulating. Therefore, for these reasons, I refer to the policy as the bedroom tax throughout the thesis.

The remainder of this chapter provides some further socio-political context to the project, before providing an outline of the key points discussed in each chapter.

Housing in austere times: London's housing 'crisis'?

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash social, political and economic decision-making in the UK (and across the Global North more widely) has been framed around a rhetoric of austerity. In the UK, the Coalition

government (2010-2015) justified severe public spending cuts as an unavoidable necessity in the face of an ever-expanding national deficit. And yet, in the midst of on-going calls for austerity measures in the UK in this post-recession landscape, London has remained a global economic powerhouse, home to the highest number of billionaires on the planet and generating more than a fifth of the total UK economy (Sunday Times 2015; London Councils 2013). However, this story of rapid recovery and prevailing economic success is unlikely to ring true for the majority of London's citizens. London is by far the richest region in the UK, and yet it is also the poorest and most unequal; 16 per cent of Londoners are in the poorest tenth of the country's population, whilst 17 per cent are in the richest (Trust for London and New Policy Institute 2015). Indeed, in terms of economic disparity, London is the most unequal city in the entirety of the developed world (Dorling 2011).

As Chapter 4 will discuss in more detail, whilst the impact of section 144 and the bedroom tax are certainly felt far beyond the confines of the M25, wider national housing precarity remains most acute in London. This is due to a perfect storm of limited housebuilding, an overheated property market that favours investors over ordinary Londoners, and a socio-political attitude that increasingly understands lower-income residents of the city to be living in areas that they do not deserve to occupy due to high land values and the potential for enormous levels of profiteering. It is also widely understood that there are far more squatters in London than in any other part of the UK. Although obtaining exact figures of squatter numbers is essentially impossible due to the transient and often secretive nature of the practice, it is estimated by the government that there were around 20,000 people squatting in London prior to the implementation of section 144 (although many squatters I spoke to believed that this was very much an underestimate) (Ministry of Justice 2011).

Around 50,000 households in London have been affected by the bedroom tax (Trust for London and New Policy Institute 2014). Whilst this is lower

proportionally than the average across the UK, the financial implications have been significantly higher due to the high costs of rent (social as well as private) in the capital (Trust for London and New Policy Institute 2014). This therefore means that Londoners affected by the bedroom tax are hit with higher rental losses than in other parts of the country.

By focusing this thesis on the impact of section 144 and the bedroom tax on London, I do not claim that the issues raised are exclusive to the capital. However, it is inarguable that housing precarity in London is particularly acute, and outcomes such as housing dispossession and the displacement of the poor to London's outskirts and beyond make retaining a home in the city a particularly difficult task for Londoners (Lees and Ferreri 2016). Issues of affordability have increasingly affected Londoners from an ever-wider range of socio-economic backgrounds. Since the financial crisis, Londoners on middle as well as low incomes have been faced with a seemingly insurmountable double-bind. The city's soaring property prices (which have on average risen by 39 per cent since pre-recession levels), coupled with stagnating wages have meant that for Londoners accessing and retaining a home in the capital has become increasingly difficult (Nationwide 2014). Alongside accelerating house prices and wages that are failing to keep up with living costs, the provision of affordable housing continues to decline, drastically failing to keep up with demand. From 2010-13, only seven boroughs (out of a total thirty-two) met their targets for affordable home-building, whilst 11 built less than half of their targeted numbers (Trust for London 2013). Demand for truly affordable social housing outstripping supply has become more and more pronounced in recent years. In the inner borough of Camden, for example, the waiting list for social housing exceeded 22,000 households in 2014 (Department for Communities and Local Government 2014), with an average of 300 new applications received by Camden Council each month (London Borough of Camden 2014). In the same year, less than 1,000 social housing properties were allocated in the borough, highlighting the staggering disparity between demand and supply.

As securing and maintaining a home in London becomes increasingly unsustainable, forced eviction has also inevitably become an overwhelming issue in the capital, with numerous high-profile cases of such evictions emerging. For example, 2013-14 saw the plight of the Focus E15 mums, a group of financially struggling single mothers who were evicted from their hostel in Newham and told they would have to relocate to other parts of the country, many miles from their families, friends and support networks (Ram 2014)⁴. Other infamous cases of the eviction *en-mass* of social housing estates, such as the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark, further highlight the increasing precaritisation of home for the city's lower-income residents (Lees 2014). Indeed, the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, elected in May 2016, has acknowledged Londoners' struggles to secure affordable and sustainable housing as one of the key issues facing the city in the coming years (Khan 2016). This was highlighted further by Paul Sng's 2017 documentary 'Dispossession: The Great Social Housing Swindle', which focused largely on council estate regeneration in London. The documentary brought the realities of the housing 'crisis' to our cinema screens, revealing central government and local authority claims that estate demolition and regeneration are for the benefit of existing communities to be a fallacy. Sng spoke to social tenants in various estates across the capital and beyond who have been awaiting eviction for years, sometimes decades. Once they are finally dispossessed of their homes, they will be forced out of their local areas due to little-to-no truly affordable⁵ housing being built as part of these 'regeneration' processes.

It is against this backdrop of incredible socio-economic unevenness that the Coalition government implemented a series of cutbacks to welfare and legislative changes that have a direct impact on housing and hard-

⁴ I return to the Focus E15 campaign in Chapter 8.

⁵ Officially, 'affordable housing' refers to housing that is 80% or less than market rates. For many in the capital, where house prices continue to soar far beyond inflation and average wages, such housing remains distinctly unaffordable.

wire forced eviction, both as an immediate and future threat, into the everyday lived experiences of London's low and no-income residents. And although it is housing policy that is the focus of this thesis, it must be noted that such targeted decision-making is part of a wide-reaching policy agenda that has sought to reduce state intervention more broadly. This agenda is enshrined in the 2012 Welfare Reform Act, which has brought about a suite of significant changes to the welfare system. Socially and politically framed as a necessary austerity measure in the aftermath of the global economic crisis, the Act included; a benefit cap that limits the amount of total benefits a claimant can receive; alterations to council tax benefits meaning that all households, no matter what their income, must contribute towards council tax; and stringent work capability assessments for those in receipt of disability allowance. This wider context makes the impact of home loss all the more pertinent. Low-income citizens are seeing every facet of their lives; their housing, their employment status and prospects, their bodies, judged and destabilised by government intervention that manages to be inherently invasive, whilst at the same time claiming to be 'rolling back' its involvement in citizens' lives.

The scope and range of these intimate governance practices introduced and built upon in the last and current administrations could constitute hundreds of theses, and to cover all related policies and impacts is inevitably far beyond the scope of this research alone. However, by retaining a focus on the home, and the ways in which it is placed under threat as a consequence of housing reform, this thesis examines the consequences of policymaking that undermines one of the core facets of our lifeworlds as human beings: the ability to secure and maintain a homespace. I argue that alterations in housing policy that have been framed as necessary austerity measures are not solely the outcomes of economic pragmatism⁶. Rather, they are a set of policies that reflect an ever-expanding ideology that frames the forced eviction (or threat of) of

⁶ This is explored in further detail in Chapter 2.

those on low or no incomes as morally just⁷. In the UK, the political and legal landscapes that undermine low and no-income citizens do so through a specifically neoliberal framework that condemns those that do not conform to approved aspirations of individualism and the acquisition of capital (Peck 2010).

Neoliberalism in the context of this thesis should be understood as a dualistic process, whereby the rolling back of the state in favour of free-market principles is espoused alongside an often, and somewhat contradictorily, heavy handed use of state power in the pursuit of the sustainment and protection of these principles. Section 144 and the bedroom tax are indicative of such methods that both dismiss and debilitate forms of housing that are not market-oriented, and concurrently contribute to the ongoing establishment of free-market logics as common-sense through practices of state intervention. The bedroom tax and section 144 reflect both destructive (the rolling-back of state welfare) and creative (the rolling-out of markets and market logics) processes of neoliberalism identified by Peck and Tickell (2002), enacted specifically through the homespace. The bedroom tax reduces state support of social housing by partially removing social tenants' access to housing benefit. Equally, through state intervention it furthers conceptions of social housing, and by proxy social tenants, as being economically irresponsible and unviable.

Section 144, too, acts as both a destructive and creative neoliberal process. It is destructive in the sense that it reduces legal protections for squatters and espouses the sacredness of private property over Keynesian-welfarist notions of social collectivism. Its creativity functions through section 144 opening up a swathe of empty properties to more market-oriented uses, namely property guardianships (to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6), whereby 'guardians' pay guardianship property companies to live in empty buildings for reduced rent on the condition that they do not have tenancies or any associated rights, and can be evicted with as little as 24-hours' notice. In short, section 144 has made room for the marketisation of squatting as a marketable, and

financially lucrative, lifestyle choice within the realms of free market logics.

Domicide is a key tool in this rolling back and rolling out of neoliberal processes within housing legislation and policy, and functions in two key ways. The intentional destruction of homes that function outside of the free market both constrains the possibility of alternative provisions and constructions of home to exist, and establishes a social, cultural and political acceptance that such forms of domicide are justified given the limited value of citizens who are not compliant to the free-market fantasy. Who is and is not deserving of home is therefore established through a value system that rewards individuals who own, or aspire to own, property, and financially punishes, physically evicts, and socially shames those who do not. This is the enactment of what Wacquant describes as state governance strategies that practice “liberalism at the top of the class structure and punitive paternalism at the bottom” (2012: 66). For those who do not engage appropriately in the private housing market, such as low-income social tenants and squatters, the state presents itself as having little choice but to penalise them under the guise of fairness. Those who remain unengaged in free market principles are framed as cheating the system at the expense of hardworking property-owning citizens, with the state having little choice but to interfere in order to rectify such disregard for free-market principles.

Beyond the dualistic destructive/roll-back and creative/roll-out methods described above, the bedroom tax and section 144 also contribute to what Keil has described as a “roll-with-it” form of neoliberalism (2009). This refers to the normalisation of neoliberal processes and mindsets, a political rationality that incites subjects to understand welfare reduction, individualism and self-care as appropriate behaviours. The same set of logics understand those in receipt of social welfare or other forms of collectivist living that fall outside of the bounds of the market as a threat to economic and social norms.

This thesis is in part an examination of such techniques of power (Lemke 2001) that, beyond destroying alternative homemaking practices, also actively promote, normalise, and celebrate the increased precarisation, of housing and home for those deemed unproductive citizens. The precarious housing circumstances of squatters and social tenants become reframed as emblematic of their lack of motivation regarding homeownership attainment and an over-reliance on welfare provision. Roll-with-it neoliberalism means that such policies, and the precarity they incite, are seen as the natural outcomes of poor decision-making on the part of individual squatters and social tenants, rather than carefully orchestrated state interventions. This normalisation of particular forms of housing precarity compounds with the devaluation of squatters and social tenants as not contributing to the free-market system, ultimately enabling the destruction of low-income Londoners' homes to be conducted in plain sight with little resistance.

Many of the themes of this thesis are bound up in these wider issues around the neoliberalisation of welfare and the precarisation of those deemed non-compliant with constructions of the ideal citizen. The bedroom tax and section 144 were chosen as case studies as they exemplify many of the on-the-ground realities of such political discourse for some of London's lowest income citizens, albeit in varying ways. The bedroom tax reveals the continuation of a socio-political structure that remains very much based on class distinctions, highlighting the ways in which particular citizens, for example people not in paid employment, or living with disabilities, are understood as less socially and economically valuable than able-bodied people (Edwards and Imrie 2003). Section 144 also constructs citizens through a moralising lens. However, unlike the

⁷ Such strategies draw interesting parallels with projects of forced eviction in the Global South. Scholars such as Datta highlight the ways in which the figure of the squatter in New Delhi is normalised as an exceptional, deviant body through legal structures that frame the squatter solely through a legal/illegal dichotomy that refuses to acknowledge informal settlements as home (Datta 2012).

bedroom tax, the criminalisation of squatting posits squatters as more actively deviant figures, casting them as purposefully guileful and threatening to the property of the hardworking homeowner (Fox O'Mahoney et al 2014). Together, the policies highlight the multifaceted ways in which intimate governance practices have the capacity to not only unmake and precaritise the homespace, but to frame this increasing precaritisation as both normal and justified. The parallel implementation of these two policies therefore further entrenches binary constructions of citizens as productive/unproductive, deserving/undeserving, moral/amoral, and so on. This is enacted specifically through the site of the home, demarcating citizens' societal worth in accordance with their housing tenure.

Bringing home the housing crisis

One of the key purposes of this thesis lies in its bringing home and housing scholarship into greater contact with one another. As relatively few scholars have noted, there is a significant lack of dialogue between the two despite their clear linkages to one another (Atkinson and Jacobs 2016; Baxter et al 2016)⁸. A lack of engagement with the concept of home within housing studies threatens to undermine the political importance of the homespace, positing it as a site that is external to political and economic spheres. This limited dialogue in particular omits the role that understandings of home can play in both analysis of the housing crisis, and the development of its solutions. One of the key motivations of this thesis, therefore, is to understand the two housing policies central to the research through the conceptual lens of home, and in particular its destruction (domicide). I engage with issues traditionally associated with housing studies such as forced eviction, the politics of tenure and the contemporary housing crisis, placing the implications for

⁸ This is an issue discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

homemaking and unmaking at the centre of discussion. I argue that this is integral in furthering scholarly understanding of London's housing landscape through positioning the consequences of housing policy not only in relation to its economic impact. Analysis of the bedroom tax and the criminalisation of squatting via home literature I argue expands our understanding of the wider social and cultural implications of housing policy. The two policies are far from solely a reflection of the contemporary economic landscape: rather, they are the consequences of complex historical processes that have constructed some citizens as being more deserving of home than others. In varying ways, both the bedroom tax and section 144 further the normalisation of social segregation via constructions of class in relation to housing tenure⁹. Therefore, one of the core aims of this thesis lies in explicitly understanding issues around housing through conceptions of the home, and encouraging more regular engagement between home and housing studies.

The final section of this chapter provides the reader with an outline of the thesis, providing a short overview of each chapter.

Thesis outline

In Chapter 2, I provide the reader with an overview of the two policies that form the core of the thesis. The chapter outlines the origins, context and remit of section 144 and the bedroom tax in order that the reader has an established understanding of both policies prior to the empirical body of the thesis. The chapter ends with an assessment of the success of the two policies in terms of the pragmatic justifications outlined by the

⁹ The relationship between social stigmatisation, class and housing tenure is a central theme of Chapter 5.

Coalition government: that the policies would reduce the welfare deficit and protect property-owners

Chapter 3 outlines the three key conceptual frameworks of the thesis: critical geographies of home, intimate governance, and precarity, highlighting the ways in which the three interconnect throughout my analysis. I argue that critical geographies of home literature is paramount to this research, critiquing traditional essentialist assumptions of the home-as hearth and instead elucidating the home as a highly political site. In particular, the chapter considers not only the importance of homemaking in our understanding of social constructions, but also the ways in which home *unmaking* and *domicide* (the intentional destruction of home) are utilised in governance practice (Porteous and Smith 2001; Baxter and Brickell 2014). This interconnects with intimate governance literature, another key concept underpinning this research. Both the bedroom tax and the criminalisation of squatting are highlighted as emblematic of policymaking and legislative practice that enters the most personal and intimate spaces of particular citizens' lives. Finally, the chapter considers intimate governance through the homespace in relation to the growing body of literature relating to precarity. Precarity forms a central motif throughout the thesis, not only in relation to the ways in which Coalition housing policy has further established precarity as a normalised state for low and no-income Londoners, but also as a point of mobilisation (Waite 2009) for those who seek to resist section 144 and the bedroom tax.

Chapter 4 gives a reflexive account of both my methodologies and the recruitment process – an element of the research process often side-lined in methodological analysis. In particular, I highlight the ways in which snowball sampling strategies constitute an important part of the direction of research and the co-construction of knowledge. As well as discussing my two intended research methods, semi-structured interviews and critical discourse analysis, I also highlight a third approach that emerged throughout the research process: that of

Political ethnography. The chapter goes on to explore my positionality, in particular focusing on the tensions I encountered between activism and academia, and issues around researching emotionally difficult subject matter with potentially vulnerable participants. Finally, I examine the ethics of the research ethics procedure itself, and ask whether ethics reviews can at times perpetrate negative figurations, particularly in relation to squatters.

Chapter 5 considers the socio-political context that enabled the bedroom tax and the criminalisation of squatting to come into being, deploying critical discourse analysis as the primary methodology. I begin by tracing the lineage of rhetorics of home in political discourse that constructs the ideal citizen, and concurrently the unproductive, deviant citizen in relation to tenure type. I retain a particular focus on British politics since the 'neoliberal' turn spearheaded by Margaret Thatcher in the late 1970s, and disseminated by all governments since. I go on to explore the ways in which squatters and social tenants have been constructed in political and media discourse as socially deviant figures: squatters as guileful home-thieves, and social tenants as workshy scroungers unresponsive to neoliberal constructions of the ideal citizen. The chapter argues that through the moralisation of tenure type, policies that precaritise the homelives of those constructed as not prescribing to neoliberal standards of citizenship are understood as morally just.

In Chapters 6 and 7, I focus on the impact of section 144 (Chapter 6) and the bedroom tax (Chapter 7) on squatters and social tenants. The chapters in particular explore the impact of the policies on the everyday homemaking capacities of squatters and social tenants affected. I examine the ways in which both the bedroom tax and the criminalisation of squatting instigate various forms of domicile, materially, psychologically and socio-symbolically. Throughout the chapters, I highlight that the precarity induced by such multifaceted instances of domicile compound to instil a state of hyper-precariety, whereby squatters and social tenants become 'locked in' to a state of perpetual

precarity that impacts every facet of their everyday lives and homemaking practices (Lewis et al 2015).

Chapter 7 highlights the varying ways in which section 144 and the bedroom tax are challenged and resisted. The chapter argues that the experiences of domicide, home unmaking and precarity that have become entrenched into the homelives of squatters and social tenants are reformulated in various contexts to act as modes of resistance. From social tenants organising around their common state of precarity to legally challenge the bedroom tax, to squatting crews dismantling any homely aesthetic from their squats in order to protect their home, precarity and home unmaking have resulted in ingenious grassroots resistance techniques. The chapter highlights that these seemingly disparate methods work together to produce a landscape of resistance as complex and compounding as the policies' impacts.

The final chapter outlines the contribution the thesis has made to geographical scholarship, particularly in relation to the three key conceptual frameworks utilised throughout: critical geographies of home, intimate governance and precarity. I conclude by arguing that the bedroom tax and the criminalisation of squatting are ultimately class-based ideological moralisations of the home. I argue that if London's 'housing crisis' is ever to be resolved, a drastic reconceptualisation of housing and home is needed: that political rhetoric and policymaking must understand housing first and foremost as home, rather than a financial asset (McKenzie 2017).

Chapter 2

Understanding section 144 and the bedroom tax: an overview

This chapter outlines the two policies (both introduced by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government 2010-15) that form the core of this thesis: the criminalisation of squatting in a residential building (section 144 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishing of Offenders Act) and the removal of the spare room subsidy, more commonly known as the 'bedroom tax'. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a strong understanding of the remit of the policies, the context in which they were implemented, and their current position in terms of political interest and amendments to their original form. The chapter also provides a brief account of the history of social tenancy and squatting in the UK in order to further contextualise the policies and highlight the socio-political lineages from which the policies emerged. The chapter ends with an assessment of the success of the two policies in relation to their intended outcomes, as stated by the Coalition government. These intended outcomes were based on the bedroom tax contributing to deficit reduction and the reduction of 'wastage' of social housing stock in terms of people living in properties larger than they need. Section 144 was posited as essential legislation in ensuring the further protection of property owners.

It should be noted at the outset that all references to both the criminalisation of squatting and the bedroom tax throughout the thesis apply to England and Wales only. At the time of writing, neither the criminalisation of squatting, nor the bedroom tax had been implemented in Northern Ireland. In Scotland, squatting has been illegal since the mid-19th century, and the bedroom tax has effectively been abolished. This occurred in 2014, when Westminster granted Holyrood the power to set

its own Discretionary Housing Payment caps¹⁰: this means that the Scottish government now covers the cost of all those in Scotland affected by the bedroom tax.

A brief history of social tenancy in the UK

Social housing in Britain was first introduced in London during the final years of the nineteenth century, and was borne out of the horrendous living conditions of the poor working classes, particularly in the East End of London, where the life expectancy of low-skilled labourers was just sixteen (Hanley 2007). The early social scientist Charles Booth's *Inquiry into the Life and Labour of the People in London* (conducted between 1886 and 1903), a large-scale study of the lives and labour conditions of the city's working-classes, brought to public attention the extreme nature of the poverty experienced by many, particularly in London's East End slums. It was during this period that the state began to integrate itself into housing provision, and Britain's first council estate was built by the London County Council in 1893 on Boundary Street (between Shoreditch and Bethnal Green) (Hanley 2007). However, it was not until the interwar period, and the 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act, that council house building was taken up on any significant scale. In the aftermath of war, council housing was for the first time acknowledged as an integral long-term solution to slum housing (Ravetz 2001). The Act provided local councils with subsidies in order to encourage housebuilding, leading to council housing rising from roughly 1 to 10 per cent of the country's total housing stock during the interwar period (Bentley 2008).

¹⁰ Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) is a funding source allocated by central government to local authorities in order to disseminate to people struggling with housing payments on a temporary discretionary basis. Its importance as a method of resistance for social tenants affected by the bedroom tax, and their advocates, forms part of the analysis in Chapter 8.

The 1942 ‘Social Insurance and Allied Services’ report, better known as the Beveridge report after its author, the economist William Beveridge, is often cited as the blueprint of the British welfare state, establishing the ‘five giants’ of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness as a set of evils to be vanquished in the post-war reconstruction of Britain (Timmins 2001). Housing was set to become a particularly urgent and problematic issue in the post-war period, as during the war huge swathes of Britain’s housing stock had been destroyed or damaged, particularly in London. Indeed, it is estimated that at its peak, V1 and V2 bombing caused damage to 20,000 homes a day in the capital alone (Calder 1969). Here, the histories of social housing and squatting become intertwined, as government housebuilding pledges failed to keep up with demand and groups largely consisting of ex-servicemen took matters into their own hands and began squatting empty buildings (Finchett-Maddock 2014; Platt 1980). Squatting at this time was deployed as an important grassroots tactic that conveyed the extremity of the post-war housing crisis and the need for decent, affordable housing across the country, especially in the war-torn capital¹¹. This was exemplified by movements such as the ‘Great Sunday Squat’ in 1946, in which an empty block of flats was occupied, and mass squatting took place in abandoned army camps (some 46,000 people were estimated to have moved into these camps at their peak) (Jenkins 1977).

Aneurin Bevan, the then post-war minister for health, despite facing consistent pressure to build social housing at a quicker rate, argued that housing quality and social mixing should be at the core of the new social housing agenda, famously stating: ‘we shall be judged for a year or two by the *number* of houses we build. We shall be judged in ten years’ time by the *type* of houses we build’ (quoted in Foot 1973: 127). Bevan

¹¹ The connections between social tenancy and squatting is a theme I return to in Chapter 8, highlighting the ways in which contemporary housing crisis campaigns have resurrected the linkages between squatting and social housing need by using squatting, repackaged as ‘occupying’, as an act of resistance.

extended the minimum standard size for council housing from 750 to 900 square feet, and in 1948 removed pre-war legislative requirements that social housing should only be provided for the working-classes, instead placing emphasis on constructing socially mixed council housing, where 'the doctor, the grocer, the butcher and the farm labourer all lived in the same street' (quoted in Foot 1973: 78). Social tenancy, then, had in its post-war design been intended as a unifying project, rather than the socially divisive tool it evolved into in later years.

Bevan's social utopia, however, did not come to pass, as the demand for ever-faster housebuilding was consequently not addressed by the Labour government. Conservative and Labour governments alike subsequently committed to higher rates of housebuilding, including the development of pre-fabricated high-rise council blocks; an architecture which has since come to define social housing (Timmins 2001; Hanley 2007). In the wake of the movement towards high quantities, rather than high quality, council homes the political (both Labour and Conservative) love affair with social housing began to disintegrate by the end of the 1960s. The Ronan Point disaster in 1968, when a gas explosion caused a 22-storey council building to partially collapse, killing four people, became symbolic of the developing negative perceptions of council housing (Ravetz 2001). Social housing became synonymous with structural and social decay; with council estates and tower blocks in particular by the 1980s and 1990s becoming infamous as hotbeds for crime and poverty (Tyler 2013). Lynsey Hanley, in her astute social history-cum-personal memoirs of council estate life, remarked of the legacy of high-rise social housing:

Tower blocks, in the public mind, represent all that is worst about the welfare state: the failure to provide the kind of housing that most people regard as a prerequisite for a happy family life; lack of choice; dependence and isolation... And concrete. Ugly concrete (Hanley 2007: 98).

As perceptions of social housing shifted dramatically during this period, so too did perceptions of their inhabitants. Bevan's vision of social tenancy as a condition of pride and social unification was replaced with the contemporary trope of the 'scrounging' social tenant. The figure of the workless deviant inhabiting concrete, crime-infested 'no-go' estates began to cement itself within political rhetoric, and thus the public psyche¹². The dawn of neoliberal political agendas in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in conjunction with a growing disregard for social housing as a viable and respectable form of tenure, helped to bring about this decisive shift in perceptions of social tenants. The advent of the 'Right to Buy' policy, one of Margaret Thatcher's first policy implementations as Prime Minister, encouraged wealthier tenants to purchase their council homes for a large discount. The Right to Buy, then, formalised perceptions of social tenancy that had been developing throughout the previous decade as something that should be escaped from, rather than be understood as housing for life.

The introduction of the Right to Buy occurred alongside another dramatic shift in social housing: the rise of housing associations. In the wake of disinvestment in social housing, the 1988 Housing Act encouraged the extension of housing associations into social housing provision. The Act enabled them to operate as private-sector companies by borrowing money and investing as private-sector entities (Hodkinson 2012; Atkinson and Jacobs 2016). From the 1980s onwards, large swathes of council housing stock were voluntarily transferred to housing associations, with many social tenant groups voting *en masse* to become housing association residents due to longstanding disinvestment in council housing by local authorities (Hanley 2007; Mullins 2010). Indeed, between 1988 and 2008, 50 per cent of local authorities had transferred their stock to housing associations (Pawson and Mullins 2010). According to scholars such as Hodkinson, such strategies were

¹² Contemporary constructions of social tenants as deviant citizens are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

deliberately divisive on the part of the Conservative Party (Hodkinson 2012). Hodkinson argues that the government saw strong public housing as a threat to their ambitions to encourage homeownership as the desired form of tenure. Disinvestment in public housing would therefore encourage constructions of homeownership as the sole aspirational form of housing. He also suggests that the dismantling of a strong and autonomous social housing movement would remove a site of opposition to Conservative policies, as social housing tenants are a traditionally Labour-leaning sector of the electorate (Hodkinson 2012). Clearly, then, housing tenure has long provided a useful tool in the construction of preferred citizens (and perhaps most importantly, electorates).

The rise of housing associations certainly contributed to negative socio-political constructions of social tenure in the long term, making explicit understandings of council housing as a failing tenure and therefore in need of assistance from the (quasi) private sector. Over time, and particularly in the wake of the 2007-2008 recession and subsequent austerity agenda posited by the Coalition government from 2010, housing associations have become driven by profit-making, building properties for market rent and sale, as well as social housing (Mullins 2010; Dorling 2014). The rise of housing associations also provoked a further shift in conceptions of social housing and the welfare state more broadly. Where once the state had been framed as a source of social provision, rhetoric had shifted to one of an 'enabling state'. Since the 1980s, social housing has fallen under this remit. As Hanley notes:

Housing associations are...seen as enablers, whereas local authorities will forever be seen as dependency-encouraging providers...The suggestion is that local authorities, which once housed half of us, will one day house none of us, and that we had better be prepared (2007: 145).

The advent of housing associations, alongside the Right to Buy, therefore further promoted the understanding that social housing is something that citizens should aspire to move on from. Those who remain are constructed as static, caught in a state of arrested development whereby limited social productivity has led to an inability to attain the more desirable tenure type.

Therefore, in a socio-political climate that derides social tenancy as symbolic of an unproductive underclass within British society, policies such as the bedroom tax that specifically target social tenants have been able to be established. The precaritisation of a once relatively secure housing tenure has been constructed as the moral solution to the continued abject behaviour of welfare dependent citizens. Therefore, the Department for Work and Pensions' assertion in 2014 that the bedroom tax had been introduced in order to bring social rents 'in line with the private rented sector' only furthers an understanding that market rates are the 'true' measure of housing value, and that those who are not part of the private property sector have until now been having an easy ride.

The bedroom tax

The bedroom tax (officially termed the removal of the spare room subsidy) is one of a suite of measures introduced by the Coalition government in the 2012 Welfare Reform Act. Borne out of the aftermath of financial recession and the emergence of a social, political and economic discourse that centred on austerity rhetoric, the controversial Act instigated a complete overhaul of the British welfare system. The Act included measures such as stringent work capability assessments for those in receipt of employment support allowance (ESA) and mandatory contributions to council tax regardless of household income. The bedroom tax comprises the core housing element of the Act, signalling a significant shift in welfare governance and re-constituting the

boundaries of what is an appropriate amount of space in the social housing context. The Department for Work and Pensions framed the decision to implement the bedroom tax as one based around fairness and tenure equality, stating that the bedroom tax has been introduced in order to bring social rents 'in line with the private rented sector' (Department for Work and Pensions 2014).

The policy affects social tenants in receipt of housing benefit, reducing the amount of rent eligible for housing benefit for tenants deemed to have one or more 'spare bedroom'. The bedroom tax allows for one bedroom per person or couple living as part of the household, with the following exceptions, as outlined by the Department for Work and Pensions (2015a):

- Two children under the age of 16 of the same gender are expected to share a bedroom, as are two children under the age of 10, regardless of gender. However, in July 2013, the High Court ruled that the bedroom tax should not apply to households where children cannot share a room due to disability.

- A disabled tenant who needs a non-resident overnight carer is permitted to have an extra bedroom.

- Approved foster carers are permitted an additional bedroom, so long as they have fostered a child, or became an approved foster carer, in the last 12 months.

- An additional bedroom will be allowed for adult children in the armed forces who continue to live with their parents, even when they are deployed on operations.

- Students away at university who return home during holidays should not be penalised.

Shortly after its impending introduction was announced by the Department for Work and Pensions, the policy's official title became largely obscured, and it is now widely known as the 'bedroom tax', rather

than the 'removal of the spare room subsidy'. This was much to the consternation of then-Prime Minister David Cameron, who stated: 'I don't accept the bedroom tax is a tax – it's an issue about benefit' (Brown 2013a). The Labour Party's Lord Best, who is often attributed as coining the term, defended the policy's populist re-naming, arguing that 'if you have to pay a sum of money and you can't escape from doing so, and that sum of money goes to the government – it looks to me all very much like having a tax' (Brown 2013b). The policy's popular re-naming helped to cement negative public feeling towards it. The use of the word 'bedroom' conjures up imagery of an aspect of home most associated with intimacy and the private. The bedroom connotes many intensely personal activities in human life: the bedroom is where we sleep, where we have sex, where we retreat in order to be alone, where we ready ourselves for the day, where we recover when we are unwell. The use of the word 'tax' also carries its own linguistic emotiveness in the context of the policy. Firstly, the use of the word instantly pits itself against one of the centrepieces of traditional Conservative policy structures: tax cuts. The 'bedroom tax', therefore, implies a lack of cohesiveness in the Conservative Party's relationship with taxation, and suggests that whilst the wealthy may reap the benefits of tax cuts under a Conservative-led administration, the poorest in society are left suffering the consequences of the taxation of highly intimate and personal decisions around their home lives. The phrase the 'bedroom tax' has also been compared to and evoked memories of the much maligned Conservative taxation of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the 'poll tax'¹³ (Perkins 2013; Stephenson 2013). Much like the bedroom tax, the poll tax is a well-known instance of Conservative policy that many argued explicitly targeted the poor and working classes through the disproportionate taxation of larger, usually

¹³ Margaret Thatcher introduced the Community Charge, more infamously known as the 'poll tax', in 1989 in Scotland, and 1990 across England and Wales. The charge shifted taxation from one placed on property, to a charge per head. The tax was widely criticised as placing the greatest burden on the working classes, and its implementation led to widespread rioting across the country.

working class, households (Esam and Oppenheim 1989). The bedroom tax therefore gained traction as a controversial and invasive policy before it had even been implemented and the impact of its introduction had been fully realised.

Since its implementation, the policy has also proved particularly controversial due to its disproportionate impact on disabled people. According to research conducted by Moffatt et al, around a third of all social tenants affected by the policy are living with a disability (2015). Cases such as that of the Carmichaels, widely reported at the time, brought to public attention components of the bedroom tax that discriminate against the specific needs of many disabled people. Jacqueline Carmichael has spina bifida; her husband, also her 24-hour carer, sleeps in a separate room as a consequence of her condition. Despite their medical need for two bedrooms, the couple nonetheless received a 14 per cent reduction in their housing benefit eligibility. The couple took their case to court, and at a Tribunal hearing in April 2014, a judge ruled that the Carmichaels were entitled to two bedrooms, and that the bedroom tax should not have been imposed. Despite this, when in 2014 a group of adults with disabilities affected by the bedroom tax, including the Carmichaels, took their case to the Court of Appeal, arguing that the impact of the bedroom tax on disabled people is discriminatory and therefore unlawful, their case was rejected (Leigh Day 2014).

However, some legal battles have proved more successful. In January 2016, the Court of Appeal ruled in favour of two parties penalised by the bedroom tax on the grounds that in their cases the policy was unlawful. The policy was challenged by the grandparents of a teenager who needs overnight care, and by a victim of domestic violence whose spare room consists of a panic room to protect her from a violent ex-partner. Legal resistance to the bedroom tax continued in March 2016, when five parties, including the Carmichaels and the Rutherfords, took their case, rejected by the Court of Appeal, to the Supreme Court, the highest in the UK legal system. In November 2016, the Court ruled in favour of two of

the five cases (the Rutherfords and the Carmichaels), stating that the bedroom tax is discriminatory against those with medical conditions that require a person sleeping in a separate bedroom from a partner or relative (Court of Appeal 2016). This inevitably raises further questions as to the discriminatory nature of the policy. Legal challenges to the bedroom tax remains paramount in resistance tactics. Indeed, more micro-scale challenges to the bedroom tax via first and upper-tier tribunals¹⁴ has become an important component of resistance to the policy, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

Beyond the legal sphere, opposition to the bedroom tax has been voiced both nationally and internationally. In December 2013, following an inspection into the UK's adherence to human rights regulations, United Nations special rapporteur for housing Raquel Rolnik published a report expressing concern that the bedroom tax was having a negative effect on many of the country's poorest and most vulnerable citizens. She stated that it was a retrogressive policy, leaving those affected in the precarious position of either struggling to stay in their homes by reducing other living costs such as food and clothing, or having no choice but to leave the homes where they had 'raised their children and lived their lives' (Rolnik 2013: 13). She also noted the 'tremendous despair' felt by many social tenants affected by the bedroom tax, and recommended that the policy be re-examined in light of emerging data that suggested little budgetary benefit, low moving rates of affected tenants, and growing rent arrears (Rolnik 2013). However, Rolnik's visit and subsequent report was met with outrage from Conservative politicians and the right-wing press. Then-Conservative housing minister Grant Shapps responded to Rolnik's recommendations by accusing her of political bias. He wrote a letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon demanding a full

¹⁴ Civil appeals relating to social entitlement are first presented at first-tier tribunals. Appeals may then be directed to an upper tribunal. Beyond first-tier and upper tribunals, appeals may then reach the Court of Appeal, and finally the Supreme Court.

investigation of her visit, and denounced Rolnik's recommendation that the bedroom tax be repealed as 'an absolute disgrace' (Shapps 2013).

Domestically, the Labour Party have positioned themselves in opposition to the bedroom tax, with both recent leaders of the opposition Ed Miliband (Labour leader 2010-2015) and Jeremy Corbyn (Labour leader 2015-present) promising to repeal the policy in the event of their election to government (Labour Press 2013; Labour 2017). The charity sector has also expressed their concerns regarding the potential impact of the policy on vulnerable people. Major housing charities such as Shelter and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published reports that in particular highlighted the disproportionate impact of the policy on disabled people (Webb 2013; Wilcox 2014). Academic institutions, too, suggested that the policy was neither a fair, nor deficit-reducing policy. Rebecca Tunstall from the Centre for Housing Studies at the University of York reported that the predicted savings of £480 million calculated by the Department for Work and Pensions had been a flawed estimation, based on an assumption that few social tenants would move to smaller properties (Tunstall 2013). Indeed, savings made via the bedroom tax from 2013-14 were £107 million less than predicted by the department themselves (Department for Work and Pensions 2015a).

In order to curb the initial impact of the bedroom tax, the Department for Work and Pensions allocated an extra £55 million (to a total of £176 million) to local authority Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funding in 2013/14 (Tunstall 2013). The funds, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8, have provided an important tool for social housing providers in attempting to mitigate the policy's impact on tenants. However, DHP funding has been reduced significantly since 2013/14, to £165 million in 2014/15, and cut by another £40 million to £125 million in 2015/16 (Department for Work and Pensions 2015b), thus further reducing options for social tenants affected by the bedroom tax.

The road to criminalisation: A brief history of squatting in the UK

In tandem with the construction of social housing, the contemporary squatting movement was borne out of a severe shortage of adequate housing in the aftermath of war. Squatting in particular grew as a practice in the wake of World War II, most significantly in London, many parts of which had been left badly scarred by the Blitz. As outlined in the previous section, the lack of housing provision, particularly for soldiers returning from the war, led to a direct action campaign that saw many homeless servicemen seizing empty properties; a movement that highlighted the failure of the 'Homes fit for Heroes' pledge¹⁵ of the interwar period to provide enough decent housing for those returning from the war. However, due in part to their alignment with communism at a particularly politically fraught time, and limited support from trade unions, the post-war squatting movement dwindled somewhat from 1946 onwards (Finchett-Maddock 2014; Platt 1980).

Squatting as a collectivised subculture re-emerged some two decades later with the formation of the London Squatters Campaign. The campaign was in part inspired by the 1966 BBC Ken Loach play *Cathy Come Home*, which depicted the heart-breaking downfall of a young, ordinary family as various incidents lead to them becoming homeless and separated from one another¹⁶. The film had a major impact on attitudes to housing and welfare at the time, with the now well-known and wide-reaching national housing charity Shelter being established just a fortnight later, in part in response to the play's message. Led by housing campaigner Ron Bailey, the London Squatters Campaign, too, emerged at this time, and in 1968 after a screening of the *Cathy Come*

¹⁵ The 'Homes fit for Heroes' or 'Homes for Heroes' pledge refers in part to Dr Christopher Addison's 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act, seen as a defining legislative moment in which local councils were placed at the forefront of housing provision.

¹⁶ Homeless shelters at the time tended to be divided by gender, with some catering for women and children, and others solely for men.

Home, the group occupied a luxury flat development in Wanstead, East London, as a dualistic symbolic gesture that both highlighted the outrage that houses should sit empty whilst others are driven into homelessness, and encouraged homeless people to establish a sense of autonomy and control over their lives (Bailey 1973; Platt 1980; 1999).

The squatting scene in London grew throughout the 1970s, with famous cases such as Elgin Avenue in the borough of Westminster being occupied almost entirely by squatters from 1972-75 as it awaited demolition and redevelopment by the Greater London Council (Reeve 2015). Squatting was particularly prevalent during this period, aided by the high concentration of empty properties in certain areas, particularly in inner London. This encouraged entire squatter sub-communities to flourish, with squatters opening businesses and holding public events in these formerly empty spaces (Reeve 2015).

However, whilst initially supported in the media, thanks in part to a public presence carefully cultivated by Bailey and the London Squatters Campaign that attempted to reinforce squatting as a legitimate response to the housing crisis, this relationship quickly soured. As the squatting movement grew, more and more young, single people, often with unorthodox lifestyles and anarchistic political views, rather than helpless families, became associated with the practice. This built upon long-standing Victorian ideology that framed the poor in terms of 'deserving' versus 'undeserving' categorisations, in which squatting became firmly associated with the latter (Platt 1999). As Platt notes:

It was one thing when squatting involved 'respectable', self-evidently 'deserving' cases of homeless families occupying empty council properties, often as part of a well-led campaign led by people who were not themselves homeless...It was quite another when the squatters were perceived to be less respectable and deserving- single people, 'outsiders', 'hippies', 'dossers' or drug takers...particularly if they turned their attentions towards empty privately owned properties or were seen to have some sort of wider political agenda (1999: 107).

As squatting became detached from understandings of the practice as a source of protection for young homeless families and became more commonly associated with individuals and groups of young, childless people during the 1970s and 80s¹⁷, it developed into a scene perceived entirely at odds with the neoliberal agendas that had simultaneously emerged within the British political system. By the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, the squatting scene had begun to fade and fracture due in part to the improved management of empty properties, the movement of many former squatters into council homes, and widespread public resentment towards those framed as hedonistic and socially frivolous (Platt 1999; Reeve 2015).

Particularly towards the end of the 1970s, the legal landscape of squatting began to alter, with the practice reframed as something that property and land-owning citizens were in need of protection from. Most notably, section 7 of the 1977 Criminal Law Act was established to provide protection from squatters for two categories of resident by making trespass onto empty property a criminal offence in the following circumstances:

— Firstly, if there is a ‘displaced residential occupier’ (DRO); someone who lives in a property and is excluded from said property by trespassers.

— Secondly, if there is a ‘protected intended occupier’ (PIO). This refers to someone who intends to occupy a property as a resident, has signed a certificate to that effect, and is prevented from doing so by trespassers.

The introduction of section 7 of the 1977 Criminal Law Act therefore made evicting squatters from residential property a more straightforward procedure, as if a squatter resisted a request to leave on

¹⁷ This despite the fact that surveys undertaken by the Department of the Environment during the 1970s revealed that most squatted properties were in fact occupied by people with children (Platt 1999).

behalf of a DRO or PIO they could be arrested and removed without a court order (Finchett-Maddock 2014).

Squatters were again targeted legislatively via the 2002 Land Registration Act, which effectively curtailed their ability to obtain rights to land via adverse possession¹⁸. The introduction of the act meant that an application for adverse possession can now only be considered after the land in question has been occupied by the applicant for at least ten years and an application submitted to the Land Registry (Cobb and Fox 2007). The Act decreed that if there has been no response from the registered title holder for two years after the application has been submitted, the occupant then becomes the registered title holder.

The inclusion of an application to the Land Registry enabled the owners of abandoned land to be alerted to its occupation, thus providing them with further opportunities to recover possession of the property (Cobb and Fox 2007). This proved a major turning point in the legal construction of squatters: prioritising the protection of land and property ownership above the need for shelter or the utilisation of abandoned space. Squatting became further framed as a pseudo-criminal act, with the Act contributing to by then long-established perceptions of squatters as socially deviant by suggesting landowners are in need of further legislation to protect themselves against the threat of squatters (Cobb and Fox 2007). And yet, despite widespread conceptions of squatters as pseudo-criminal, squatting remained a civil offence for another decade before a campaign within parliament in the Coalition era led to its partial criminalisation.

In the wake of his election to Parliament in 2010, then-Conservative MP for Hove and Portslade Mike Weatherley spearheaded a campaign to

¹⁸ Adverse possession is a method of gaining legal ownership rights to land or property from its previous owner, usually via a longstanding occupation of 12 years or more. Adverse possession in this context is often referred to in the popular lexicon as 'squatters' rights'.

criminalise squatting, tabling an early day motion¹⁹ in 2011, and giving an impassioned speech in Parliament in the same year calling for squatting to be criminalised (Weatherley 2011a). Weatherley stated that squatting was:

A huge problem in my Hove and Portslade constituency...I wish to dispel the myth once and for all that squatters and homeless people are one and the same...squatters do not fit the profile of the kind [of] vulnerable people we should be looking out for...Members of the public are getting tired of hearing that squatters are getting so much for free when they are struggling to get by. They are fed up too with the anti-social behaviour and general mess caused by squatters (Weatherley 2011b).

Weatherley's anti-squatting activism began to gain traction in parliament, and the criminalisation of squatting began to appear as though it would emerge as a likely outcome of the campaign.

Homelessness and housing charities began to express concern regarding the potential impacts of Weatherley's call for squatting's criminalisation. The homelessness charity Crisis published a report shortly after Weatherley's speech that countered the MP's argument, stating that squatting is in fact a common response to homelessness. The report suggested that 40 percent of single homeless people squat, and that its criminalisation would therefore result in placing an already highly vulnerable homeless population at an even greater risk (Reeve 2011). The campaign group Squatter's Action for Secure Homes (SQUASH) also published a parliamentary briefing urging MPs to reconsider the proposed illegalisation of squatting. They argued that the law change would impact adversely on already vulnerable groups, empower unscrupulous landlords and encourage property speculation, thus furthering the issue of empty properties, particularly in cities such as London. They also cautioned that criminalisation would burden the

¹⁹ An early day motion is a formal motion submitted for debate in the House of Commons, usually by an MP.

justice system, police force and thus ultimately the taxpayer via court and imprisonment costs (SQUASH 2011). Despite the concern expressed by the charity sector and grassroots voluntary organisations, Weatherley's campaign nonetheless gathered momentum, and following a brief consultation, section 144 was added as a last-minute amendment to the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishing of Offenders Act 2012. As of 1 September 2012, section 144 of has rendered squatting in residential buildings illegal (squatting in a commercial property remains a civil, rather than criminal, offence). A person convicted under section 144 is now liable for six months' imprisonment, a level 5 fine (£5,000), or both (Ministry of Justice 2012).

However, to date the legislation's introduction has led to relatively few arrests under section 144. According to data obtained by myself from the Metropolitan Police Service (via the Freedom of Information Act), the number of persons proceeded against for squatting in a residential building in London from 2014-15 was 38, comprising 20 charges and 18 cautions. These numbers are exceedingly low considering it is estimated that there are around 10,000 squatters in London alone. However, conversely, these figures may in and of themselves be evidence of the legislation's success, reflecting the fact that fewer people are taking the risk of squatting in a residential building, often choosing to instead inhabit commercial properties or establish alternative home-making practices entirely (the impact of section 144 on squatters' ability to secure even short-term accommodation will be discussed further in Chapter 6).

In the wake of section 144's implementation, there have been calls from anti-squatting campaigners for further legislation to criminalise squatting in commercial, as well as residential, properties. In 2013, Mike Weatherley again tabled an early day motion, this time calling for squatting in commercial properties to also be criminalised (Weatherley 2013). Notably, this time the desire to extend section 144 emanated from across the political spectrum. In September 2013, three prominent

London Labour politicians, Chuka Umuna (MP for Streatham and former Shadow Business Secretary), Tessa Jowell (MP for Dulwich and West Norwood), and Councillor Lib Peck (Leader of the London Borough of Lambeth), wrote an open letter to then-Justice Secretary Chris Grayling that called for squatting in commercial properties to also be criminalised. They evidenced their concerns with two cases in Lambeth where squatters in commercial properties had caused thousands of pounds' worth of damage (Peck et al 2013)²⁰.

Despite this, the appetite to extend section 144 to commercial properties appears to have waned in recent years, as the early day motion and letter to Grayling are yet to have produced any legislative change. To date section 144 remains applicable to residential buildings only. However, campaign attempts to repeal the law, such as the SQUASH report *The Case Against Section 144* (SQUASH 2013) and now-shadow chancellor John McDonnell's early day motion calling for the repeal of section 144 (McDonnell 2013) have also proved unsuccessful. Therefore, although for the time being section 144 applies only to residential buildings, repeal also remains unlikely in the current political climate.

A pragmatic success? Intended versus actual impact of section 144 and the bedroom tax

As Chapter 5 will discuss in more detail, section 144 and the bedroom tax were both framed prior to their implementation as rational decisions made in the context of a post-recession economy and driven by the necessities of austerity. Political rhetoric framed the policies as both protecting the fundamental and financially astute right to property

²⁰ The letter and its implications for the construction of the squatter as inherently criminal will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

ownership (in the case of section 144), and as a method of reducing an ever-expanding welfare deficit (in the case of the bedroom tax). Both policies were implemented in a political landscape that has long lauded and sought to protect homeownership as a model of successful citizenship, and concurrently denounced welfare reliance as socially parasitical (Nowicki 2017a). Both section 144 and the bedroom tax purported to provide protection for citizens that aspire to the individualist trajectories of neoliberal citizenship construction. Therefore, when considering the impact of the two policies, it is important to outline whether their outcomes have fallen in line with the promises of supposedly pragmatic financial gains and homeowner protection so vigorously promoted by the Coalition government, and the more recent Conservative majority government.

Section 144

The Ministry of Justice framed the implementation of section 144 as a legislative decision centred on providing increased protection for residential property owners via the removal of ‘squatters’ rights’. As previously discussed, these purported rights stem from section 7 of the Criminal Law Act 1977, under which it is an offence for a person without lawful authority to use or threaten violence to gain entrance to a premises against the will of those inside (Ministry of Justice 2012). The presumed impact of section 144 was therefore that it would become; ‘more difficult for trespassers to assert they have rights in respect of residential buildings because their occupation of the building will be a criminal act’ (Ministry of Justice 2012).

At first glance, it would appear that the stated intentions of the Ministry of Justice did not come to pass. According to data I obtained under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, legal action has been taken in relation

to 180²¹ people in London under section 144 since its implementation. When we take into account that according to government estimates there are 20,000 squatters across the UK (Ministry of Justice 2011) (although many squatters remain adamant that this is a vast underestimate), at least half of whom live in the capital²², it would appear therefore that an extremely limited number of squatters have faced legal prosecution under section 144.

However, to dismiss the impact of section 144 as an unsuccessful piece of legislature on this basis is to overlook two key factors that emerged consistently during my research. These factors reveal that such low prosecution rates are in themselves an indicator of successful implementation as publicly intended by the Ministry of Justice. First, and as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6, all squatters who participated in this research commented on the shift in squatting from residential to commercial properties (which remain outside the remit of section 144) as a consequence of the law change. A longstanding volunteer at the Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS) (a group providing practical and legal advice for squatters), described this to me shift as ‘absolutely immediate’. Indeed, all except one squatter interviewed during the research period were living in commercial, rather than residential buildings post-September 2012, and only one squatter that I met had heard of anyone squatting in a residential building post-section 144²³.

²¹ According to Freedom of Information requests made by myself, and subsequent data shared with me by the Metropolitan Police, 75 cases were proceeded against under section 144 between September 2012 and March 2013, 67 between April 2013 and 2014, and 38 between April 2014 and March 2015. The number of these cases that led to fining or imprisonment has not been recorded by the Metropolitan Police.

²² Due to the transient (and now often illegal) nature of squatting, accurate estimations of the number of squatters living in London is hard to come by. However, squatter participants have told me that by far and away the largest squatter scene exists in London. This is a logical assumption when we consider that there are nearly 60,000 empty dwellings in the capital according to 2014 data (Greater London Authority 2014), and that London has often been at the centre of subcultural movements throughout history.

²³ An acquaintance of one of my participants specifically squatted only in residential buildings in order to test the viability of section 144 by seeing how often he got arrested under the law change. I return to this story in Chapter 8.

This goes some way to explaining the lack of prosecutions under section 144; as squatters move into a legal space dictated by the civic, rather than criminal, courtroom. The logic follows that the likelihood of squatters being found, arrested and prosecuted under section 144 becomes relatively minimal. Therefore, the lack of section 144 prosecutions may in fact demonstrate the success of the law change in dis-incentivising squatters from moving into residential buildings.

The second key factor that suggests the limited prosecution numbers may indicate that a successful element of the policy lies in the fact that section 144 has reduced the desirability of squatting entirely as it becomes more legally precarious. Indeed, during a symposium on the housing crisis that I attended in autumn 2014, the ASS volunteer mentioned earlier commented during one of the event's seminars on squatting that the telephone had been 'deafeningly silent' in the wake of section 144's implementation, as so fewer people were successfully able to find appropriate and safe places to squat in the capital. It would appear, therefore, that in their desire to 'protect' the owners of residential property from the perceived threat of squatters, the impact of section 144 can be regarded a success by the Ministry of Justice.

However, a second impact that stands at odds with government assertions that section 144 is a pragmatic solution to austerity is the manner in which it reveals the extent of empty properties in London: a reality that appears counterintuitive to political and economic rhetoric centred on the concept of a housing crisis due in part to lack of property, particularly in the capital. The implementation of section 144 therefore should not necessarily be seen as a success on the part of the Coalition, but rather as a policy that highlights the impact of poor decision-making regarding housing in London. The connection between section 144 and the waste of unoccupied property acquires a particular irony when it is considered that one of the aims of the bedroom tax, the second key case study of this research, was to reduce the under-occupation of property. Section 144's criminalisation of those that seek to make use of empty

property therefore appears to stand at confused odds with government rhetoric that frames welfare policies as the reduction of waste (and specifically property waste in relation to the bedroom tax).

Therefore, even in relation to the pragmatic, protective agenda espoused by the Ministry of Justice, the implementation of section 144 can in some ways be understood as a means of highlighting the failures, rather than successes, of governments past and present to adequately utilise space in the city. Although the criminalisation of squatting has achieved some of its intended impact goals in terms of discouraging squatting in residential buildings and potentially reducing the number of squatters in the city, the policy's pragmatic downfall lies in the fact that it simultaneously highlights and ignores the crisis of empty properties in the capital.

The bedroom tax

The bedroom tax too, was framed as a pragmatic response to the post-recession climate by the Coalition government. According to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the bedroom tax was implemented as a necessary decision borne out of austerity. The DWP promoted the introduction of the policy as a means of reducing welfare deficit, and as a response to the issue of overcrowding in the social rented sector (Department for Work and Pensions 2012). However, the outcomes predicted by the government failed to materialise, and the impact of the bedroom tax on a national economic scale was far below Coalition expectations.

Despite an original estimate that the policy would save £480 million in the year 2013/14 (Department for Work and Pensions 2012; Tunstall 2013), the actual amount saved, according to DWP data, suggested a saving of £373 million, £107 million less than expected (Department for Work and Pensions 2014). If we also consider that the DWP allocated an

extra £55 million to local authorities in Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) in order to reduce the shortfall in rent created by the bedroom tax (Department for Work and Pensions 2014), then this amounts to an even larger gap in savings between the original government estimate and the reality, with the policy saving over £160 million less than initial DWP calculations.

The policy's impact on reducing overcrowding was also highly limited, as the reality of housing stock in this tenure means that there is a very limited amount of smaller social housing to downsize to. Indeed, a report by the DWP found that only 6 per cent of affected households had moved into smaller properties, and only 4.5 per cent into social housing (Department for Work and Pensions 2014). This is in keeping with an investigation by *The Independent* in 2013 that revealed that, if all households in the UK affected by the bedroom tax had decided to downsize, social housing stock would only be able to cater for 4 per cent of those moves. This is due to the fact that social housing stock is particularly limited when it comes to supplying smaller properties, with the majority historically being built to house families (Ravetz 2001; Timmins 2001). Therefore, those that do make the decision to downsize in order to avoid the bedroom tax are likely to be placed in private, rather than social, rented accommodation. Private rents far exceed those of social rents, costing on average 40 per cent of a tenant's salary (compared to 30 per cent in the social rented sector) (Bentley 2015). Therefore, somewhat ironically, those that do as the bedroom tax purports to encourage and downsize may in fact place a higher financial burden on the taxpayer due to larger housing benefit subsidies needed in order to cover private rent costs.

Therefore, despite the Coalition government's framing of section 144 and the bedroom tax as pragmatic solutions to deficit and property protection in an era of austerity, the practical outcomes intended have in most instances failed to materialise, or have appeared alongside concurrent outcomes that in fact may incur deficit increases or highlight

property waste. I therefore argue that the impact of section 144 and the bedroom tax, in keeping with the morality-driven, intimate methods of governance regularly deployed in modern British political history, has been distinctly ideological, rather than solely pragmatic, in its intent. The predicted impact of fiscal benefit and solving concerns of over and under-occupation in social housing has been limited in the case of the bedroom tax. The successes of section 144 in abolishing squatting are equally tenuous, as the law change's impact is both relatively difficult to measure, and the legislation has highlighted the extensive property waste in London in particular. This furthers the understanding that the two policies are far from solely a product of necessary austerity measures in the post-recession era. Rather, they contribute to and further entrench moralistic visions that punish citizens deemed undeserving and unproductive.

The remainder of this thesis explores these two policies in depth in terms of the ways in which squatters and social tenants are constructed as socially deviant and therefore deserving of legal and policy penalisation; their domicidal impact on the everyday lives of squatters and social tenants; and the ways in which the policies are resisted.

The following chapter takes a conceptual turn, highlighting and extending three key bodies of scholarship that together enable further understanding of how and why section 144 and the bedroom tax were able to come into being.

Chapter 3.

Precarious Homes

In this chapter I outline the key conceptual frameworks utilised throughout the thesis, and the ways in which they interconnect to highlight both the lineage and consequences of section 144 and the bedroom tax. The thesis draws on three key bodies of literature: critical geographies of home, intimate governance, and precarity. These concepts are central in furthering understanding of the relationship between the two policies and the ways in which citizens are (im)moralised through the site of the home.

I begin with a discussion of critical geographies of home literature, spearheaded by feminist geographers over the past decade or so, as a geographical sub-discipline that challenges traditional essentialist constructions of the home as private and apolitical, arguing that the home is an inherently political site. I trace the extension of critical geographies of home literature, in particular focusing on the emergence of the concepts of domicide, home unmaking and their relationship with homelessness literature. The chapter also questions the limited dialogue between critical geographies of home literature and housing studies, and highlights the need for stronger interaction between the two sub-disciplines, an issue that this thesis in part attends to. I also elucidate the relative lack of geographical work in relation to squatting in the Global North beyond understandings of squatting as a method of activism.

The chapter goes on to trace the relationship between home and intimate governance by elucidating the ways in which governance practices and decision-making is often conducted through the most intimate and everyday spaces of citizens' lives, the homespace being a crucial site whereby such governance occurs. From housing policies that prioritise nuclear families in Singapore, to tax breaks for married couples and 'broken families' rhetoric in the UK, I highlight that throughout the world

areas of life often deemed to be 'private' are time and again influenced and steered by policymaking. Finally, I connect the home and intimate governance to the growing body of work on precarity. I begin by tracing the rise of precarity as a prevalent academic concept both in the social sciences and within geography more specifically. In particular, I call for greater attention to be paid to the ways in which precarity should be construed not only as a normalised condition in the contemporary neoliberal era, but how it can also act as a platform for strategies of grassroots resistance and activism.

'Moving past the front stoop': critical geographies of home

All that is discussed and analysed throughout this thesis can be traced back to one word: home. This research is fundamentally about our relationship with home, who is portrayed as deserving of it; what happens when it is taken away from us; and how we fight back in order to regain it. Although now a growing sub-discipline within geography, it has only been in the past decade or so that the home has begun to be taken seriously as a key socio-political site with valid conceptual insights to offer geographers.

Much work into the geographies of home has lain in its relationship with belonging, comfort and material culture (Manzo 2003). There exists an extensive and ever-growing body of literature that explores the nature and nuances of people's emotional relationships to homespace (see for example Blunt and Varley 2004; Miller 2001; 2008; Burrell 2014). This includes literature focusing on senses of place, place attachment and place identity. Such literature has tended to focus on the relationship between people and place as one embedded in rootedness, belonging and comfort (Manzo 2003). The home in particular has been commonly understood as an intrinsically positive site. This was particularly true prior to the mid-1990s, with scholars such as Peter Saunders for example

insisting that there were no gendered divisions or tensions within the confines of the home. Based on a household survey (whose participants were solely middle-class populations) he asserted that there are no differences in the way men and women view meanings of home (Saunders 1988). The sociologist Peter Somerville, in a similar vein, produced an 'objective' set of signifiers of home, consisting of: shelter, hearth, heart, privacy, roots, abode and paradise (Somerville 1992).

Such attempts to quantify home and its meanings grossly oversimplified the complex relationship people have with home, in particular overlooking negative aspects of home as for example a site of women's oppression or domestic violence (Blunt and Dowling 2006). Such deterministic and essentialist associations between home and comfort led scholars to bemoan the 'benign' approach taken by studies of domestic spaces that sought to whitewash the reality of a world that is constantly subsumed with politics, tension and conflict, including within the homespace (Sibley 1995).

Over the last three decades, feminist geographers in particular have spearheaded critical geographies of home debates, urging us at the end of the twentieth century to 'move past the front stoop' (Domosh 1998: 276) to consider the home as an important political, social, and spatial site. Following a seminal conference on 'Geographies of Home' at University College London in 2000, and the 2004 special edition of *Cultural Geographies* that emerged as a consequence, home began for the first time to be seriously acknowledged as a vital element in critical understandings of the politics of the everyday in geographical scholarship (Blunt and Varley 2004; Blunt 2005). Once seen as mundane and irrelevant, the banality of everyday practices within the home, such as cooking, decorating and other forms of domestic work, were refigured as having far-reaching implications in the wider political sphere (Blunt and Varley 2004; Enloe 2011). Cultural and feminist geographers such as Mark Llewellyn (2004) and Janet Floyd (2004), for example, considered the domestic kitchen as both a site of the reinforcement of gender roles,

and as a potential site for the (re)negotiation of gender, class and national identities. Geographies of home as a critical academic field in its own right, particularly in regard to critical analysis of the everyday, was concretized by the publication of Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling's seminal book *Home* (2006). Here, home was considered across truly multi-scalar sites; its location, meaning and imaginings stretching from the dwelling, to the neighbourhood, to the nation. Through these multiple scales and physicalities, Blunt and Dowling encouraged the consideration of home beyond traditional essentialist and humanistic representations of the home as sacred space. Moving beyond such conceptualisations of the home as an apolitical, private space (see Relph 1976; Csikzentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Dovey 1985; Terkenli 1995), geographers have in recent years argued that the home is an intrinsically political site, not only passively affected and shaped by governance practices and socio-political trends, but that one that itself actively impacts wider politics in and of itself (Brickell 2012a): the homespace acting, for example, as a site through which gender, class and racial identities and performativities are constructed, enacted, reinforced and resisted (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Brickell 2012b).

Increasingly, the pertinence of home as a tool of governance has become increasingly acknowledged within social sciences literature. Walters coined the term 'domopolitics' to express this intrinsic relationship between the homespace and governance practices (2004). As he notes, domopolitics articulates modes of governance and power that imply 'a reconfiguration of the relationship between citizenship, state, and territory. At its heart is a fateful conjunction of home, land and security' (Walters 2004: 241). Walters distinguishes domopolitics from previous conceptions of political governance economy, traditionally allegorised as being akin to the governance of a household. Governance of the state as *home* rather than *household*, Walters argues, attends to the rationale of neoliberal governance practices beyond solely improving the economic efficiency and output of citizens. Rather, domopolitics constructs a relationship between citizens and the nation through an emphasis on

social and cultural, as well as economic, prisms. This ensures the securitisation of the nation-state through a politics of affectation that binds the nation to traditional depictions of home as hearth, as a site of safety that both protects and is in need of protection (Walters 2004; Hynek 2012).

An integral function of domopolitics, then, is the ways in which it juxtaposes affectations of the homely nation-state against the external threats of the 'outside world', a particular configuration of 'us vs. them' binary depictions of nationhood and security that implicitly mobilises, generates and legitimises fear of those deemed external to the safe confinement of the homespace (Walters 2004; Darling 2011; Hynek 2012). Walters examines this binary through the example of the USA's Department of Homeland Security as an explicit framing of the nation-state as a homespace in need of protection from unhomely external forces. In the UK context, Turner has utilised the concept of domopolitics in research examining the infamous eviction of Irish Traveller communities from the Dale Farm site in Essex in 2011 (Turner 2016). He argues that the eviction was justified through an ongoing political framing of home and domesticity that outcasts the homemaking practices of Travellers as 'failing' domestic norms, and thus failing as citizens (Turner 2016). As Chapter 5 will discuss in detail, such political marginalisation enacted through the homespace is, I argue, a key factor in the introduction of both section 144 and the bedroom tax.

Critical geographies of home and housing studies: interconnected, yet disconnected

Clearly, then, critical geographies of home scholarship has gained much traction in recent years as a crucial means of consolidating the interconnections between the political and the everyday (Brickell 2012a). This growing body of research highlights that understandings of

the home must in part move beyond the dwelling alone. Clearly, home can, and should, be conceptualised in a wide array of contexts and geographical scales. However, having said this, housing of course remains integral to the critical study of home. Whilst the two should not be conflated with one another, they are nonetheless clearly interconnected in many ways (Smith 2008; Atkinson and Jacobs 2016). For many people across the globe, the house forms a focal point for homemaking practices, for example through establishing senses of belonging and self through interior design (Madigan and Munroe 1996). Equally, housing can be a key contributor in instances of home *un*making, for example through the demolition of or forced eviction from housing (Brickell et al 2017). Housing, then, is often at the centre of our understandings of home, and at the centre of policies and practices that seek to destroy our sense of home.

However, despite these clear connections, housing studies scholarship has tended to overlook the concept of home (Atkinson and Jacobs 2016). This can in part be attributed to the continued devaluation of the domestic within housing studies, with the concept of home often continuing to be positioned outside of political and economic spheres (Atkinson and Jacobs 2016; Baxter et al 2016). Housing scholars such as Susan Smith and David Morley have sought to redress this lack of dialogue between housing studies and conceptualisations of home (Morley 2003; Smith 2008). In an insightful account of the relationship between homeownership, the marketisation and housing and meanings of home, Smith highlights the ways in which the governance of housing interacts with the micropolitics of home. This is particularly pertinent in an era in which housing is increasingly marketed as primarily a space of consumption and financial profitability (Aalbers 2016). Smith argues that this financialisation of housing does not detract from its importance as a site of home construction. Rather, the two are complexly enmeshed with one another, as 'financial services and housing economics thread savings, spending, and debt through the fabric of housing and home' (Smith 2008: 530).

The current and future implications of the increased financialisation of housing has established itself rightly as an area of study and discussion crucial to highlighting the structural inequalities embedded within housing markets (Aalbers 2016; Fernandez and Aalbers 2016; Rolnik 2003). The term ‘housing crisis’ is continually bandied across academia, political discourse, the media and in the public lexicon more broadly as a crisis of economy. However, little mention is made to the ways in which the relationship between market forces, housing and national (and international) economies impact people’s home lives, their senses of home, their loss of home. The housing crisis is far from merely the consequence of financial recession. It is the consequence of a decades-long ideological project that has sought to sever understandings of housing from the human need for home, repackaging housing as a source of financial profiteering over and above a fundamental site of human identity construction (Madden and Marcuse 2016). Now, more than ever, housing and home scholars need to forge better dialogue in order to challenge this new norm. This thesis, I hope will contribute to extending such dialogue.

Squatting and home: a scholarly omission

Another key element of this research that is by and large missing from both housing studies and critical geographies of home literature, and indeed geography more broadly, is the practice of squatting in Western cities. Social sciences literature relating to squatting has predominately been researched and theorised in relation to slum-dwelling and other modes of informal housing in cities of the Global South (see for example Neuwirth 2004; Davis 2006; Datta 2012). There are of course some very notable exceptions to this. The cultural and historical geographer Alex Vasudevan has sought to bridge the conceptual divides between squatting in the Global South and Global North, calling for a ‘global

geography of squatting' that attends to the ways in which squatting, in its myriad forms, is a means through which to understand alternative imaginaries of the city that manifest themselves in precarious conditions (Vasudevan 2015a). As Neuwirth notes in his account of global urban squatting: 'the world's squatters give some reality to Henri Lefebvre's loose concept of "the right to the city"'. They are excluded so they take' (2004: 311). Vasudevan and Neuwirth's research highlight both the ways in which squatters are precariously bound in their own illegality/informality, and the ways in which squatting acts as a means of the reclamation of a right to exist within the urban landscape. The practice of urban squatting and its associated struggles to establish and maintain an autonomous urbanism have been catalogued in particular detail through Vasudevan's in-depth exploration of the social, cultural and political contributions squatting has made across a range of time periods and locations (see Vasudevan 2015a; 2015b; 2017). In particular, his work has examined the ways in which the everyday and makeshift practices of squatters in Berlin have historically contributed to the establishment of autonomous urban practices, re-imagining the city as a site of radical grassroots politics (Vasudevan 2015b).

Socio-legal scholars, too, have in recent decades established a body of literature on squatting. In particular, research has examined the practice of the urban and legal transformations that squatters often incite through their repurposing the law from an inhibiting factor (in terms of squatting's growing illegalisation), to a means of establishing rights to, and autonomy in, the city (Pruijt 2004; Dobbz 2012; Finchett-Maddock 2014)²⁴. Literature on squatting posits the practice as a reclamation of the commons, an alternative to capitalist constructions of property law and modes of living in the city (Cattaneo and Martinez 2014). This relationship between squatting, law and alternatives to capitalism has for example been explored by Finchett-Maddock in relation to squatted social centres. Finchett-Maddock argues that by inhabiting legal grey

²⁴ This theme will be explored further in relation to section 144 in Chapter 8.

areas, social centre collectives reimagine the city, redefining legal structures and reclaiming land for public use rather than financial consumption (Finchett-Maddock 2010). The criminalisation of squatting in the UK has also been documented across legal and sociological scholarship, with a recent edited collection examining the relationship between the political economy of land and property ownership and rhetorical constructions of squatters²⁵ (see Fox O'Mahony et al 2015).

However, squatting remains conspicuously absent from critical geographies of home literature. Geographical, sociological, and legal scholarship has considered squatting in a variety of ways, from a performance of autonomy and resistance, to a means of necessary shelter in precarious social and political circumstances. What has been little researched, however, are the ways in which squatters construct a sense of home, the relationship between squatting, home and forced eviction, or the ways in which squatting acts as a means of reconstructing meanings of and rights to home. Where squatting has explicitly been constructed as a homespace within geographical literature, this has usually been in relation to informal and slum housing (Datta 2012). Research such as Datta's is clearly invaluable in contributing to better understanding of the ways in which the legal/illegal is manifested in the everyday intimate practices of home in squatter settlements, and how the issue of illegal settlements remains a highly contested and incomplete task, both for the state and for the squatters themselves. However, similar research in relation to Western urban squatting remains limited, with such forms of squatting often bound up within research pertaining to radical activism, rather than homemaking practices. I argue that further examination of all forms of squatting as home, as well as its role as a practice bound up in activism, is needed in order to establish a fuller picture of squatting's place within the urban environment. This is not to say that these two elements of urban squatting are mutually exclusive. Indeed, the very act of homemaking in

²⁵ The profound implications of which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

such precarious circumstances highlights a form of activism that is embedded in everyday practices: that the act of establishing a home in such a legally precarious environment is in and of itself a radical re-imagining of the city. However, I argue that these two sides of the same coin need more balanced attention in squatting literature and research. As I argue in Chapters 6 and 8, narratives of squatting should be careful not to omit the practice's relationship with home. To do so threatens to contribute to the delegitimisation of squatting as a form of homemaking, and thus threatens to dismiss section 144, increased instances of forced eviction, and other forms of violence against squats as actions that are not equated with the destruction of home.

This thesis is in part a call for extending discussion around squatting as a homemaking practice, and equally the ways in which political rhetoric, legislation and policymaking contribute to the destruction of home in the context of squatting. The following section of this chapter hones in on the concepts of domicide (the intentional destruction of home) and home unmaking, highlighting their integral role in understanding the impacts of, and resistances to, both section 144 and the bedroom tax.

Domicide and home unmaking

This thesis is concerned with conceptualisations of the home particularly in circumstances whereby the homespace comes under threat from invasive governance practices. Therefore, it is important to emphasise that much of my discussion of critical geographies of home in the context of section 144 and the bedroom tax lies specifically in understanding what the consequences are when home is dismantled: when it is *unmade*. Squatters' and social tenants' homelives have in recent years been shaped by its destruction, and the subsequent adjustments to everyday life that have to be made. In particular, the terms 'domicide' and 'home unmaking' have proved crucial in determining both how and why section

144 and the bedroom tax destroy homelives, and how new constructions and understandings of home are rebuilt in the face of aggressive intimate governance practices. The following sections of this chapter trace homelessness literature, highlighting its relatedness to the concepts of domicide (the intentional destruction of home) and home unmaking. The chapter goes on to highlight how section 144 and the bedroom tax enact home destruction through class-based intimate governance practices that demonise low and no-income citizens as undeserving of home if they cannot afford, or don't appear to aspire, to buy one.

From homelessness to home-loss

The scale, scope and varied experiences of homelessness have been the subject of considerable attention in geographical scholarship. Research has elucidated homelessness as a complex and multifaceted process, one that cannot be determined solely by attributing it to 'houselessness' (see for example Somerville 1992; May 2000; Mitchell 2011). Scholars such as Don Mitchell have highlighted the ways in which the homeless are denied rights to the city, despite the city's streets and parks often forming the core of their homespace and sense of identity. In the US context, methods of exclusion from public space, and therefore from rights to urban life for homeless people have taken the form of for example illegalising activities associated with homeless people such as panhandling (begging) and sleeping on benches (see Mitchell 1997;2003; 2011).

Others have explored the ways in which homelessness can be experienced even when one has a roof over their heads. Robinson's work for example provides an empirical account of teenagers in Sydney who had moved from being 'houseless' into accommodation, and yet still felt themselves to be without a home. This was due to people they owe money to coming to their new flat to threaten them, and unwanted

violent family members turning up unannounced and staying for long periods of time (Robinson 2002). Hidden homelessness has also been researched in detail by scholars, highlighting for example the rise in sofa surfing, those living in temporary accommodation, the role of domestic violence in removing a sense of home from the dwelling, and the particular conditions of homelessness in rural locations (see Meth 2003; Cloke et al 2007; Clarke 2016). Homelessness has also been reconceptualised as a non-linear process, whereby people's relationship with homelessness is often episodic, what May terms 'homeless careers' (2000). May interviewed single male hostel users about every accommodation and rough sleeping event they had experienced, and the duration of those events. Based on this research, he constructed 'triple biographies' which outlined changes in personal, employment and accommodation circumstances over time. He found that:

For the majority of single homeless people the experience of homelessness is neither singular nor long term but episodic, with each homeless episode interspersed with often extended periods in their own accommodation and with no increase in either the frequency or duration of homeless episodes over time (2000: 615)

May and others have argued that homelessness should not be seen solely as the fallout of structural failings. Central to understanding homelessness and its impact on those who experience it in myriad ways should be an acknowledgement of the ways in which trauma and grief both contribute to initial homelessness, and are carried as memories and psychological scars throughout a person's housing biography: that the trauma of home-loss can be as powerful as the experience of homelessness (Dovey 1985; Cloke et al 2010).

This thesis' concern with processes of domicide and home unmaking connects to homelessness research, as both terms contribute to understandings of the trauma experienced when homes are under

threat. The subjects of this thesis are not homeless in a statutory sense, however, many (particularly squatters) experience forced eviction from their homes on a regular basis, and many social tenants affected by the bedroom tax now live in a permanent state of fear that homelessness is around the corner. Processes of domicide and home unmaking therefore contribute to a body of literature that highlights the pertinence of home-loss, of home destruction, and the trauma of both its aftermath and its normalisation within certain citizens' housing careers. The following sections further elucidate the centrality of home-loss and home destruction to this thesis through an examination of the concepts of domicide and home unmaking.

Domicide

Domicide, the intentional destruction of home, is a concept first outlined by Porteous and Smith in their seminal 2001 work *Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home*. *Domicide* is a detailed portrayal of 'the deliberate destruction of home by human agency in the pursuit of specific goals, which causes suffering to the victims' (2001: 12). Using the categories 'extreme' and 'everyday', the authors cite a wide range of examples across the globe of domicide and its impact. Extreme domicide focuses on the destruction of the homespace on a grand scale via three main strands; war (for example carpet bombing in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia), colonial geopyracy (for example the removal of indigenous people from their ancestral homelands by white settlers in for example the USA and Canada), and resettlement projects (such as ethnic segregation in apartheid era South Africa). Porteous and Smith then move on to consider the impact of everyday forms of domicide, stating that 'unlike extreme domicide, the everyday variety comes about because of the normal, mundane operations of the world's political economy' (2001: 106). Focusing on an example of dam construction in

British Columbia, this section of their typology emphasizes the localized scale of domicide, whereby homes, neighbourhoods and smaller settlements are demolished to make way for political and/or corporate interests.

Porteous and Smith's work provided a significant contribution to critical conceptualisations of the home, highlighting the multifaceted ways in which the home can be deliberately destroyed under the auspices of ideology and/or political pragmatism. However, the authors' terminology at times conveys an overly simplistic understanding of the home as a site of security and safety, often failing to acknowledge the complexities of the home, for example in relation to its role for some as a site of violence, repression and fear (Brickell 2012b). Discussions of domicide have also tended to retain a focus on the destruction of, or displacement from, the physical dwelling. Whilst highlighting the trauma of these physical manifestations of domicide are undoubtedly of great importance in developing an understanding of the implications of home destruction, to limit conceptualisations of domicide solely to the materiality of the house, much like associating homelessness solely with houselessness, holds the potential to render invisible its, often subtler, social, cultural and political consequences.

As I have argued in previous work, it is therefore integral to extend domicide further, to consider the home and its destruction beyond the physical alone (Nowicki 2014). A consideration of the political and personal implications of *socio-symbolic* forms of domicide forms an integral part of this extension. As Blunt and Dowling note in their seminal work; 'home...is a *place*, a site in which we live. But, more than this, home is also an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings' (2006: 2). The home does not consist solely of bricks and mortar, and can be dismantled and destroyed in a variety of forms. As Ó Tuathail and Dahlman note, domicide 'is the erasure of the spatiality of home not necessarily the destruction of property' (2006: 245). However, such acknowledgement and exploration of the socio-symbolic consequences

of domicile has thus far manifested itself only in a limited number of historical and geopolitical literatures concerning populations displaced by war. For example, in their tracing of the Bosnian post-war landscape, Ó Tuathail and Dahlman consider the ways in which the character of Bosnian spatialities and landscapes of home were violently erased. More than two million people were displaced by the war, losing, beyond property alone, their 'homes, communities and the personalized meanings they had built around home places' (Ó Tuathail and Dahlman 2006: 246). In the reconciliation period, too, the Dayton Accord separated once diverse landscapes into ethnically singular zones, recasting and subsequently displacing social, cultural and historical landscapes of home built through generations.

In Harker's (2009) research focusing on Palestinian displacement, domicile too is also harnessed to understand the intentional destruction of home beyond the loss of or removal from the dwelling alone. For one participant interviewed, the loss of the familial home his father had built brought about domicile not only in the loss of a physical site of security, but also deprived him of future stability for himself and his family. For Harker's participant, home and its loss is 'not simply a set of spatial relations in and of the (temporal) present, but also a set of relations extending towards the future' (2009: 326). In both instances, although the loss of, or displacement from, the material home may be the initial locus of grief, the domicidal impact felt through such loss moves far beyond the four walls of the house, and into the social, symbolic and temporal sites of the home. Although these socio-symbolic elements have been touched upon in geopolitical literature as discussed, further insight regarding the implications of socio-symbolic domicile across a wider set of sub-disciplines, for example social and political geographies, is vital in extending academic understanding of the many and varied consequences of the intentional destruction of home. This thesis therefore explores the domicidal impact of section 144 and the bedroom tax through an examination of 'compounded domicides'. In Chapters 6 and 7 in particular, I highlight the multivalent ways in which domicile is

felt by squatters and social tenants, from increased financial precarity, to negative impacts on mental health, to the (re)establishment of squatters and social tenants as undeserving of home and thus justifying domicide as morally fair.

Home unmaking

Building upon the concept of domicide, throughout the thesis I also employ 'home unmaking' as a means of understanding the complex processes and politics of the home. As Baxter and Brickell have argued, much of the critical geographies of home literature to date has focused on methods and practices of homemaking, and negated the role of 'home *unmaking*' in the perpetration of social, economic and political injustices (Baxter and Brickell 2014; Brickell 2013). Home unmaking extends the concept of homemaking, exploring the fluidity and unpredictability of the homespace across the lifecourse, and the ways in which the home may be dismantled and/or reconstructed in a wide variety of circumstances, for example due to eviction; marital breakdown; indebtedness; death, and so on (Baxter and Brickell 2014). Home unmaking also reveals the ways in which the loss of home can in some circumstances have a positive transformative effect, providing the opportunity to construct new forms of home out of the ashes of the old. For example, in her research around marital dissolution in rural Cambodia, Brickell (2013) argues that the home unmaking brought about by relationship breakdown and divorce can provide a means of emancipation for women who are victims of domestic abuse.

In the context of this thesis, I am primarily concerned with the relationship between home unmaking and class. Through the analysis of political speeches, interviews with squatters, social tenants and other stakeholders, and my attendance at many protests, conferences and political rallies since 2013, my research highlights how home unmaking

has been experienced time and again as an often deeply classed phenomenon. From the targeted destruction of the homes of low-income Londoners justified through austerity pragmatism and moral fairness, to the experiences of disabled tenants of forced eviction and penalisation for having 'spare' rooms needed for storing medical equipment, the class-based nature of home unmaking is writ large throughout this work. Whilst section 144 and the bedroom tax are clearly domicidal, in that they deliberately destroy the home and/or homemaking capacities of squatters and social tenants, the policies also resonate on a wider scale with the more fluid and multifaceted concept of home unmaking. Particularly in Chapter 8, both the fluidity of the home (as something that is made and unmade at varying stages of the lifecourse) and the potential for home unmaking to bring about possibilities for resistance and change are brought to the fore. Grassroots resistance groups legally challenge the bedroom tax, taking their fight all the way to the Supreme Court. And squatters disguise their home as a site of middle-class gentrification, both unmaking their homespace through removing any signs that it is a lived space, and remaking it via hiding, and thus protecting, it. The stories outlined in Chapter 8 highlight the complexities of the homespace, and the continued potential for home to be remade and reconceptualised, even when it is under serious threat from domicidal policy and legislature. Together, therefore, domicile and home unmaking prove crucial in understanding both the ways in which government policy and legislative changes dismantle the homemaking capacities of low-income citizens through the practice of intimate governance, and elucidate the means by which squatters and social tenants develop and enact methods of resistance.

Governing through intimate spaces: home and the everyday

As this thesis will elucidate, the home acts as a key site through which to construct and maintain the ideals of class-based citizenry promulgated by state ideology. In the context of this research, individualism and free market practices, the lynchpins of neoliberal governance, form the core of what a home should, and should not, constitute²⁶. Squatters' and social tenants' positionality as citizens has been constructed in many ways via their relationship with the homespace being inverse to these constructed ideals. Squatters and social tenants are understood to be either unwilling or unable to engage with neoliberal constructions of the home as a site of equity and free market security (Flint 2003). This therefore constitutes a justification of policies that unmake the homespaces of squatters and social tenants as morally sound decisions.

Section 144 and the bedroom tax act as methods of intimate governance that seek to moralise the homespace through a dualistic strategy that lauds homeownership and derides social tenancy and alternative forms of homemaking as socially deviant. Both policies are examples of the home, traditionally understood to be an intimate site set back from the politics of the 'outside world', being utilised as a site through which to penalise those deemed unworthy citizens. This is a strategy of intimate governance, whereby the (de)construction of citizenship is established through socio-cultural sites most commonly framed as existing in the 'private sphere', such as the home, the family, sexuality and the body (Plummer 2003; Willis 2014).

Similarly to critical geographies of home literature, conceptualisations of intimate governance seek to expose essentialist binary understandings of the public and private spheres as myth. Intimate citizenship highlights the myriad ways in which citizens are produced and governed through

²⁶ The relationship between citizenship construction and rhetorics of home in the neoliberal era also forms one of the key elements of Chapter 5.

personal and everyday spaces and imaginaries such as family, sex and sexuality, and the home (Wilkinson 2013). Contemporary critical analysis of the complex and intertwined relationship between the personal and the public is rooted in the work of sociological theorists such as Jürgen Habermas and Henri Lefebvre, who began in the mid to late twentieth century to dissect imagined boundaries between public and private life. This interconnectedness of the public and the private was explored initially within social and cultural studies, and the onslaught of a post-industrial capitalist society which saw the evolution of the everyday and private spheres into a site of mass consumption. Both Habermas and Lefebvre argued that it was within this social restructuring and the emergence of post-industrial living that the cultural and social were repositioned into and through the intimate spaces of people's lives. Culture was no longer something that only social elites could access; cultural ideas and imaginaries seeped into the everydayness of human life, particularly through mediums such as mass media in the form of the television set, now a ubiquitous part of the normative family home (Habermas 1989; Lefebvre 2014). This has of course become ever-more pertinent in a contemporary era defined by the ascent of social media, whereby the 'outside world' constantly streams through our mobile phones, tablets, laptops and so on (Willis 2014). Indeed, Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 US election is in large part associated with targeted advertising on social media sites during the election campaign (Hall et al 2016; Rivero 2016). In short, the content we browse through in the quiet of our homes is both profoundly affected by, and in turn affects, national and global politics.

The everyday

Alongside these deconstructions of the public/private distinction developed theorisations and critique of the everyday. This was led both by Marxist theorists such as Lefebvre (2014), and in the growing body of critical feminist scholarship, particularly from the 1990s onwards (Domosh 1998; Enloe 2011). The "everyday" is a term imbued with ambivalence, but at its most basic level refers to the repeated, often mundane actions of human existence. Although what constitutes these

actions are, too, ambivalent and socially and culturally specific, they can be understood as a collective imaginative: that particular acts have been historically embedded as everyday, and constructed dichotomously in opposition to acts and processes cast as exceptional.

As feminist scholars have argued, the everyday, far from describing what we might understand as the benign and apolitical, should be understood as part of social, cultural, political and economic processes. This however is inhibited by the ways in which the everyday is valued: namely that processes and actions within the everyday are attributed less value than the exceptional and the out-of-ordinary. This limitation of value is invariably gendered, with social and cultural imaginings of the everyday framed as a feminine space: women as the keepers of the everyday, and thus restricted by its mundane connotations and devalued in relation to men, more often associated with the exceptional acts and processes (Highmore 2002). For example, the social and political values of domestic routines such as housework are consistently understood as inherently incomparable to the decisions made by political leaders. Such chronic devaluation of the everyday as a feminised, apolitical site have been countered by scholars such as Mona Domosh, Cynthia Enloe and Katherine Brickell, who argue that the political is both enacted and shaped through everyday spaces and routines, including the home (Domosh 1998; Enloe 2011; Brickell 2012a).

The everyday is also a particularly pertinent space in the context of precarity. At this thesis attests, the everyday has been politically appropriated, particularly in the post-2008 recession context in the UK, as a means of placating and normalising precarious conditions, constructing a state of what Lauren Berlant terms "crisis-ordinary" in which precarious, disrupted and diminished conditions of housing, employment, and so on, are reconfigured as the norm, the everyday (Berlant 2011). In particular, this thesis considers the entrenchment of precarious housing conditions, imbued with displacement,

discrimination and subjugation, as newly constituting the everyday for squatters and social tenants affected by section 144 and the bedroom tax. The more such derisory, and clearly political, tactics, are implemented into their home lives, the more socially, politically and culturally embedded it becomes that such treatment is ordinary. This is in turn perpetuated by squatters and social tenants themselves internalising this normalisation, and thus accepting such precarious home lives as everyday. What is at stake in such constructions of the everyday, then, is that, without widespread challenge and critique, such recasting of what lies within its bounds establishes the continued, and increasingly violent, subjugation of those deemed unproductive citizens within the realm of the everyday. This label of everydayness is therefore dangerous in its propensity for placating populations into understanding violent, and deeply political, acts, as a normative part of the social fabric.

Intimate citizenship

The wide variety of mediums and institutions within which our most intimate and seemingly private decisions are bound up has further come to the fore within the social sciences in recent decades through the conceptual development of intimate citizenship (Oswin and Olund 2010; Enloe 2011; Plummer 2001; 2003). The sociologist Kenneth Plummer defines intimate citizenship as:

A sensitising concept which sets about analysing a plurality of public discourses and stories about how to live the personal life... It suggests appropriate ways of living lives with others and to foster the civilising of relations at a time when some people see only breakdown, 'dumbing down', and a general lack of civility in social life...At a time when a collapse of values and ethics is often claimed, it suggests a new climate of emerging moralities and ethics. (2001: 238).

At the core of intimate citizenship, then, lies an establishment of supposed choices we must make in our personal lives that determine our morality as citizens, and our contributions to wider society. Intimate citizenship and governance practices present us with seemingly individualised choices around our private lives, relating to our homes, our families, our sex lives, our bodies, our health, and so on. Simultaneously, these choices are moralised: that the choices we make relating to the most intimate areas of our lives are indicative of our worth as citizens, and are understood to have profound implications for the societies we live in.

This politicisation of the personal and the role of intimate citizenship in the formation and governance of the 'ideal' citizen has been explored in particular detail in relation to sexuality, race and gender constructions.

The role of sexuality in citizenship formation has been rigorously theorised and critiqued by geography and sociology scholars, particularly in relation to homonormativity, 'pink-washing' and the mass commercialisation of gay culture (Bell and Binnie 2000, 2006; Duggan 2002; Puar 2013). Racialised constructions of citizenship have been explored in detail through the lens of a 'backlash of multiculturalism' (Hewitt 2005), whereby national identity formation is reconstructed through a rhetoric that suggests racialised 'others' are an incompatible and destructive influence on the 'native' white citizen (Caluya 2011). And gendered dimensions of the role of intimate citizenship have, in turn, considered how sites in which traditional gender roles are performed, such as domestic settings, have the power to both oppress women, and allow space for the renegotiation of such roles (Floyd 2004; Llewellyn 2004; Brickell 2014).

However, one area of socio-political categorisation that has seen less attention in discussions around intimate citizenship is that of class. The role that intimate governance plays in shaping, maintaining and responding to the confinements of class categorisation thus far tend to have been acknowledged under a wider remit of inequality, and tends to be predominately discussed in relation to race (Plummer 2005). The specificities of class as a vessel for producing certain types of idealised citizen through the governance of everyday spaces are yet to be widely addressed in geographical and sociological literatures, although in recent years some scholars have begun to explore this area in more detail. For example, Wilkinson insightfully analyses the state promotion of coupledness in the UK through the rhetoric of 'Broken Britain' in Cameron's Conservative-led coalition government (Wilkinson 2013). Wilkinson in part explores the implicit correlation in government rhetoric between working class family breakdown and crime rates, a rising welfare deficit, and general social dysfunction. This thesis therefore contributes to the extension of such conversations around the interplay between intimate governance and class formation, and the

ways in which the home acts as a focal site for the moralisation of low-income Londoners.

Section 144 and the bedroom tax constitute manifestations of intimate citizenship that define appropriate citizenship through tenure type, stigmatising those whose housing circumstances are marginal to the ideals of homeownership and market forces. This is a form of what Wacquant has termed 'territorial stigmatisation', whereby discrimination is spatially distributed as a tactic that penalises the poor and constructs them as the architects of their own poverty (Wacquant 2009). In the context of this research, this is enacted through the homespace. Particularly in relation to social housing tenants, the 'territorial' element of the stigmatisation process lies in imaginings that connect social tenancy with the much-maligned council estates of the 1960s onwards. For many decades, the structural failings of such estates, led by decreasing local and national government investment, have been attributed to the moral and social failings of those that live in them. Although clearly social homes exist in many housing typologies and are not confined to estates alone, social tenancy has nonetheless become synonymous with the council estate, and by proxy with degeneracy, crime, and moral decay (Tyler 2013; McKenzie 2015).

This form of territorial stigmatisation discussed in this thesis is therefore one based on the imagined council estate as a degenerate form of homemaking. Such stigmatisation reaches into some of the most integral, yet vulnerable elements of citizens' lives, and devalues their societal worth based on their housing circumstances.

Moralising the home through tenure and class

Government policies across the globe are regularly framed around a moralistic rhetoric that encourages and supports particular kinds of homes and households, and deters and denounces others. This state dictation of what a home should be is governance at its most intimate,

producing hierarchical structures of citizenship that instruct citizens on how to conduct the most personal aspects of their lives. There are a wide range of examples across the globe of intimate governance that have been enacted through the homespace, with varying degrees of explicitness. For example, housing policy in Singapore specifically prioritises state housing for those who are considered to have a 'proper family nucleus'; reducing homemaking options for the many single male migrants who work in the city-state. Through the site of the homespace, therefore, Singaporean housing policy rewards those it deems appropriate citizenry, and inhibits the lives of those it does not (Oswin 2010). On the other side of the world, local governments in the USA, in

flagrant disregard to the 1968 Fair Housing Act, focus the development of social housing in existing ghettos rather than more affluent areas, thus furthering social and racial segregation (Robinson 1995; The New York Times 2015)²⁷. Citizens are divided and defined by the geography and tenure of their homes and neighbourhoods; the spaces in which they conduct their everyday lives constructed through governance strategies that racially and socially discriminate them through the medium of the homespace.

In the UK context, citizens are encouraged to form homes and households that are in keeping with normative neoliberal ideologies. Married couples are rewarded with tax breaks, and 'troubled families' associated with welfare dependency, addiction, and crime are framed as a growing national crisis that must be curbed by government intervention (Cameron 2011; Wilkinson 2013). Since the 1980s in particular, UK government policies across the political spectrum have revolved around the stringent governance of those it deems to be 'troubled' (namely those dependent on welfare), and the implementation of a moralising agenda enacted through the homespace. Processes of gentrification, instigated by both private developers and local and central government bodies, dispossess social tenants of their housing to make way for high-value housing and wealthy tenants in the name of urban 'regeneration' and neighbourhood improvement (Kallin 2011; Campkin 2013; Watt 2013; Kallin and Slater 2014).

Perhaps one of the most notable and agenda-setting enactments of intimate governance through the home is former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's 'Right to Buy' policy. Introduced by the Thatcher administration in 1980, the Right to Buy was a seminal point in the fervent promotion of individualist, anti-welfare rhetoric that has shaped British class politics ever since. The policy encouraged tenants in social

²⁷ The American network HBO's *Show me a Hero* provides a riveting fictionalised account of one example of this resistance to housing integration in the city of Yonkers, New York during the 1990s and 2000s.

housing to purchase their homes for a fraction of their market value. Inevitably, only those with enough capital were able to transition into homeownership; by proxy only the poorest tended to remain in social housing. This forever changed the social and cultural landscape of home in Britain. The Right to Buy not only decimated the country's social housing stock, it also led to the class-based politicisation of tenure type. Where once the inhabitants of housing stock of all tenures had consisted of reasonably mixed social and economic backgrounds, they were now far more homogenous in nature, with the poorest and most vulnerable in society remaining in social housing (Timmins 2001). As the number of homeowners in Britain swelled as a consequence of the Right to Buy, homeownership became more explicitly lauded as the desired tenure type.

In the contemporary era, market forces are lauded as key to the formation of an economically productive and socially just society (Smith 1994). In the UK, all governments since Thatcher's have since disseminated a rhetoric that frames homeownership as the only aspirational form of tenure, promoting it as beneficial for both the individual and the state (Flint 2003; Lowe et al 2012; Blandy and Hunter 2013). For the individual, the primary function of the home has been reframed as a financialised space; a source of equity and financial security, particularly in retirement (Smith 2011). For the state, the privately owned home has become a symbol of economic buoyancy and an important site of moral justification for the rolling back of welfare services. The homeowner has thus been framed through neoliberal rhetoric as an idealised citizen; the pinnacle of socio-economic responsibility who seeks individual ownership rather than state reliance (Flint 2003).

This construction of the ideal citizen through the homespace has therefore enabled those who remain in social housing to be framed in direct contrast to the economically ambitious homeowner. Particularly in the wake of Right to Buy, social tenants have been reframed as

slovenly, parasitical figures clinging to the apron strings of the welfare state due to a lack of individual socio-economic aspiration (Morris 1994; Tyler 2013). Although the policy was introduced by a Conservative government, it should be acknowledged that such rhetoric has also been continued and furthered by the political centre-left. Indeed, Blair's New Labour government(s) (1997-2007) played a significant role in the development of this trope, cementing a public affectation that associated the council estate in particular with crime, degeneracy and moral decay (Tyler 2013)²⁸. Such moralised depictions have justified urban regeneration projects, the dismantling of social housing and reductions in welfare support (Campkin 2013). Controversial welfare cuts (of which the bedroom tax is just one) implemented by the Coalition government via the 2012 Welfare Reform Act are further testament to the notion that those reliant on state support are undeserving, taking from society and contributing nothing in return.

The Right to Buy was therefore something of a paradigm shift in British politics of home and methods of intimate governance: a policy manifestation of neoliberal agendas that seek through everyday sites such as the home to promote individualist behaviour whilst concurrently moralising those that remain welfare dependent as defunct citizens. Such assertions, intertwining tenure type and social class tropes, foregrounded the (re)establishment of normative modes of intimate governance to come into being. Much like Victorian-era depictions of the benevolent upper classes helping the poor to help themselves, neoliberal governments exceptionalise the poor as citizens that require invasive governance strategies in order to be moralised and restored as functional, independent members of society.

It is through such a rhetorical lens that domicidal policies and other governance practices are able to be implemented and justified. Intimate governance practices that focus on the homespace as a site through which to moralise particular citizens as societally deviant have

²⁸ These issues are discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

significantly altered London's socio-political landscape. Acts of intimate governance such as section 144 and the bedroom tax dismantle the homemaking capacities of squatters and social tenants, both unravelling their ability to belong in the city, and promoting such decision-making as morally just.

Examining the implementation and impacts of section 144 and the bedroom tax through the conceptual frameworks of critical geographies of home and intimate governance are therefore key in understanding three issues fundamental to this research. Firstly, how such policies have been able to come into being. Secondly, their multifaceted effects on low-income Londoners. And thirdly, the ways in which grassroots resistance is manifested and deployed. However, section 144 and the bedroom tax are not isolated phenomena detached from the wider socio-political condition in the UK. In order to relate the concerns around the implementation and impact of these two policies, a third conceptual element becomes integral. Prevalent within the strategies of intimate governance discussed that produce domicidal outcomes is a wider and prevailing sense of precarity. Policies such as section 144 and the bedroom tax are contributing to a larger societal shift in the UK in recent decades, in which the precarisation of once concrete social infrastructure such as job and housing security and a national health service has become established as not only a normalised condition, but a socially just response to moral decay and worklessness. The final section of this chapter explores the role of precarity as both an entrenched condition, and as a means of resistance, constructing the home as a site through which grassroots activism is enacted.

Precarious Geographies

Recent years have seen precarity evolve as a key academic buzzword in social science literature, foregrounded in the work of polemic feminist political theorists such as Judith Butler (2009; 2011; 2012) and Lauren Berlant (2011). Butler, in particular, has called for a social ontology of precariousness, whereby we understand *precariousness* as an innate human condition, one that continually exposes us to 'both to those we know and to those we do not know; a dependency on people we know, or barely know, or know not at all' (Butler 2009: 14). For Butler, precariousness is a condition that emanates from our very sociability as human beings. However, she argues that *precarity*, on the other hand, is a politically induced process forged through power relations and governance practices: the exploitation of precariousness for the benefit of some and at the expense of others (Butler 2009; 2011; 2012). In *Frames of War*, Butler considers the ways in which depictions of modern warfare in media and political rhetoric present some lives as more grieveable than others: that along the constructed boundaries of gender, race and so forth are forged understandings of who has societal, cultural and political worth, and who does not (Butler 2009). Precarity, then, is a condition constructed through value: that those who experience precarious conditions most acutely do not produce enough worth to mitigate it. This expression of human worth is intrinsically embedded in the structures demarcated by capitalism, for which the concept of worth is integral.

Berlant further expands upon the structural political embeddedness of precarity in her work *Cruel Optimism*, arguing that precarity is inherently intertwined with neoliberal economic practices (Berlant 2011). Capitalism in and of itself is rooted in a reliance on precarity, dependency and risk. Capital is produced through precarity via the mobilisation, and normalisation, of investment in free market structures that offer the chance to profit from what is uncertain: for example, the private property

market. In the neoliberal capitalist context, then, precarity is framed as not only a normalised condition, but as a means of achieving a profitable 'good life' – with its promises of job security, upward mobility and socio-economic equality (Berlant 2011). The increased privatisation and the rolling back of welfare services that occur alongside this form part of what Berlant describes as the 'neoliberal feedback loop' (2011: 192). Precarity is re-distributed along class lines as those not engaging in the free market are constructed as morally unsound and thus deserving of their precarious condition, and those investing in neoliberal economic and social structures are told that their fantasies of the 'good life' will be rewarded.

The work of scholars such as Butler and Berlant in dissecting the relationship between an understanding of precarity as a normalised social condition, and the economic and political structures that oversee this, has been invaluable in establishing precarity as a key concept in contemporary social sciences. However, it is only in recent years that precarity's relationship with the spatial has come to the fore within geographical scholarship. In a critique of Butler's discussions of precarity, Harker notes that for Butler the spatial is rendered secondary to the temporal; portraying place as a passive receiver of the active dynamism induced through and by the temporal, rather than as an important component of structure of precarity in and of itself (Harker 2012). This relative absence of the spatial nature of precarity has begun to be redressed within geographical literature, most significantly in relation to labour market conditions. Particularly in the aftermath of global economic recession and a wide-reaching international political rhetoric that espouses economic austerity and pragmatism, precarity has become embedded across many spectrums of the workforce, in the Global North as well as the Global South, a set of regions more traditionally associated with precarious working conditions in the geographical imaginary. From low-paid workers such as cleaning and manual staff, to higher-paid professions, particularly in the creative industries, precarity, often taking the form of by-now ubiquitous zero-

hour and fixed-term contracts, has become enmeshed with normalised understandings of contemporary labour practices (Waite 2009). Such labour structures have proved to be pervasive in nations traditionally committed to social welfare such as the UK, where employment had in previous decades been associated with strong unions and permanent contracts. This increasing spread and entrenchment of precarity within the labour market has been linked markedly to an era of ever-expanding neoliberal globalisation, in which all aspects of life have become commodified and made vulnerable to disposal according to market processes and needs (Waite 2009; Standing 2011; Lewis et al 2015).

A recent paper by Lewis et al further examined ever-increasing precarity within the labour market through a lens of 'hyper-precariety': whereby precarity is experienced at varying sites and stages of the labour process (Lewis et al 2015). In their discussion of forced labour and migration to the Global North, the authors highlight the multifaceted ways in which precarity is both enacted and compounded upon the figure of the migrant worker, from the abuses and restraints of border regimes, to outcomes of trafficking such as high levels of indebtedness and limits to mobility through, for example, the confiscation of passports. The work of Hunt, too, examines the entrenchment of compounded precarity, albeit in the more everyday and ubiquitous setting of the urban corner shop. For Hunt's participants, independent shopkeepers in central London, labour precarity is both induced and underwritten on a day-to-day basis. Shopkeepers are consistently undercut by supermarket chains and harassed with threats of eviction and closure by local authorities who deem the aesthetics of such shops as detrimental to the profit-making potential of the local area (Hunt 2016). Such multivalent forms of precarity, both spatial and temporal, therefore work across different settings and labour conditions to lock particular figures in to a life defined by many-layered and diversely experienced precarities. Inevitably, the more layered and compounded the precarity, the more difficult it becomes to wield agency or establish long-term, stable and socially just working conditions. This compounding of precarity is also

particularly pertinent in the context of the austerity agenda imposed upon the UK by the Coalition and proceeding governments. Especially in London, under the auspices of economic necessity, wages growing below inflation and an increasing zero-hour and flexible contract culture meet with soaring house prices and the culling of housing welfare services to create a perfect storm of compounded precarity for many citizens. This links back to Butler's account of grieveable life and the concept of worth: that, according to neoliberal logics, those who experience precarity are doing so as a consequence of their limited socio-political value in a time of financial crisis.

Precarity remains most widely discussed and analysed as a concept in relation to employment. The pervasiveness of precarity within labour market structures has arguably been most notably conceptualised by the economist Guy Standing (2011; 2014), who argues that precarity has resulted in the manifestation of the *precariat* as a contemporary working-class category. Standing's work outlines key characteristics of contemporary labour and workforce structures that differentiate the precariat from its predecessors. Unlike the working classes of the pre-deindustrialisation era, whose relationship with labour was commonly associated with high-skilled and long-term industry based employment that included paid holiday and sick leave and secure pensions, the precariat is made up of people whose long-term work patterns consist of insecure jobs interspersed with regular unemployment (Standing 2011). Such instability has subsequently impacted on other aspects of everyday life, destabilising access to and the maintenance of housing, and the erosion of paid leave and other work-based social welfare such as pensions (Standing 2014). The permeation and normalisation of precarity within the labour market has also led to the dismemberment and fragmentation of people's sense of work-based identity. Standing argues that this in turn begins to impact on wider aspects of social identity, inciting an increased sense of alienation not only towards employers and the labour market, but with people's relationship with the state itself and their own sense of citizenry. As more and more people see

their rights associated with citizenship, such as employment security and work-based welfare, dismantled, precarity becomes an entrenched condition that produces socially and politically disenfranchised subjects – denizens, rather than citizens (Standing 2011; 2014).

It is here that the resistive potential of precarity and the precariat begins to take shape. Standing refers to the precariat as a ‘dangerous class’, due in part to their detachment from the previously core social structures, certainly in Western Europe, of work-based security and social welfare. He notes:

To say the precariat is ‘dangerous’ is to make the point that its class interests are opposed to the mainstream political agendas of the twentieth [and twenty-first] century, the neoliberalism of the mainstream ‘right’ and the labourism of social democracy (2014: 31)

This opposition to mainstream political agendas therefore holds the potential to harness precarity as a point of organisation and mobilisation for this ever-expanding group. Although Standing has argued that the precariat’s lack of homogeneity renders organised protest movements difficult, with resistance more likely to take the form of rioting and civil disorder, others have noted that it is through this very lack of fixity and stability that resistance can emerge (Gill and Pratt 2008; Standing 2011; 2014). The very nature of precarity as producing insecure, destabilised subjects can be harnessed to highlight, to both the public and those that govern, the social injustices taking place. Scholars such as Philo (2005) and Waite (2009) have noted that through bringing the precarity of particular groups to the fore of protest movements and strategies, questions around who holds responsibility for such precarisation can be publicly prioritised. In struggles for improved and re-regulated working conditions, precarity can form the centrepiece in campaigns that involve a wide array of actors (for example, the workers themselves,

community organisations, politicians and the media) with varied interests (Wills 2008). Such campaigns provide contemporary forms of unionisation, that centre around common experiences of precarity, rather than a particular workplace. For example, *United Voices of the World* are a grassroots, member-led trade union that primarily supports people of Latin American descent in London who are working under precarious labour conditions in the city's low-wage economy; namely in catering, security and cleaning industries. Unlike traditional trade unions, *United Voices of the World* are not employer-based, and members support any worker in need of their services, regardless of what company or industry they are employed by. Their work often focuses on fighting for rights to for example paid sick and maternity leave, once presumed areas of employment-based welfare now commonly dismantled, particularly in low-wage sectors. Through their work, *United Voices of the World* are unifying and mobilising once disparate and isolated employees, highlighting the injustice of their precarious conditions and demanding employers take responsibility for the care of their staff. Successful methods of resistance have included strike action and public protest outside their places of work; making visible their precarious working conditions and shaming companies to act in their favour.

Other resistance movements that have called for an end to labour precarity, such as the MayDay marches established in Milan in 2001, and the more recent worldwide Occupy Movement, have also mobilised around the increasing pervasiveness of precarious labour conditions and a demand for alternatives to capitalist existence, rather than a single issue of protest, highlighting the affective power of resistive language that engages with precarity as a concept (Waite 2009). Resistance to injustice in a neoliberal labour market dominated by fragmentation and de-regulation has not been able to form in the same political language utilised by pre-Thatcherite unions. Instead, contemporary unionisation has focused on finding weaknesses in neoliberal socio-economic structures that produce common ground among multiple actors; for

example, concerns around job quality; housing; crime, and so on (Wills 2008). As neoliberal socio-political structures have changed the labour landscape, means of resistance have adapted accordingly, with precarity in terms of job insecurity or low pay often forming the primary issue from which to develop resistance movements.

However, although precarity and its relationship with protest and resistance has been examined in some detail in relation to the labour market, there has been little in the way of discussion within geographical literature that explicitly links precarity to non-labour oriented resistance movements. Some extended discussions of precarity within the discipline have developed beyond geographies of labour, for example in relation to cultural urbanism. Scholars such as Harris and Ferreri have examined the rise of temporary practices, such as low-cost 'pop-up' and interim site uses, in the contemporary urban landscape (Harris 2015; Ferreri 2015). They caution that, beyond normalisation alone, such practices at times go so far as to celebrate precarity as a creative cultural practice and symbol of innovation. A forthcoming special issue in *Cultural Geographies* convened by myself and a colleague extends some of these concepts, exploring the ways in which precarity has become embedded as a cultural, as well as political, normative structure (Harris and Nowicki, forthcoming). The issue addresses the relationship between cultural practice and precarity in a wide array of contexts, ranging from the growing trend of property guardianship in the UK (Dawson and Ferreri, forthcoming); to the Calais 'Jungle' refugee camp as a site of material and imaginative precarity that produced hope and despair, home and its unmaking (Mould 2017). Others have examined the biopolitics of precarity and constructions of the self in the context of neoliberalism and austerity (McCormack and Salmenniemi 2016).

Particularly in an austerity-led socio-political climate, in which every corner of social welfare has seen drastic cuts and, in the case of social housing in the UK, threats to its very existence, precarity has come to permeate every facet of everyday life for low and no-income citizens. As

precarity has developed into something of a status quo in countries such as the UK, the ways in which people respond to and resist austerity-induced precarity has inevitably evolved. As more people are marginalised by invasive policies that destabilise core elements of day-to-day life such as the homespace, the more likely it becomes that people will organise around their common state of precarity.

Although an often debilitating condition that has seeped into the innermost corners of low-income Londoner's everyday lives, precarity also holds the potential to stimulate new forms of agency and grassroots resistances. This is explored in detail in Chapter 8, where I trace the multifaceted ways in which squatters and social tenants utilise precarity as both a rallying point and a survival strategy. This ranges from social tenants affected by the bedroom tax using social media platforms to organise resistances to their precarious circumstances, to squatters utilising gentrification aesthetics and repurposing one of the contributors of their displacement to 'hide in plain sight' and thus avoid eviction. Precarity provides a shared point of injustice, and subsequent political action, for groups of people that may otherwise not have banded together, or been otherwise politically mobilised. In cities such as London, where for many citizens, every facet of day-to-day life has been rendered precarious and fractured, and legislation and rhetoric frames the poorest and most precarious as deviant and criminal, traditional methods of protest and resistance such as rallies and strikes, become more difficult to employ for some (Tyler 2013).

This is where the home plays a particularly important and dualistic role in understandings of precarity. On the one hand, the home acts as a site made increasingly precarious by policy and legislative changes such as the bedroom tax and the criminalisation of squatting. On the other, its ideas, rights and values are mobilised through an activist outcry that denounces the existence of precarious homelives and demands change. As the UK housing crisis affects vast swathes of its citizens in different contexts and in varying forms of extremity, it is logical that the home

should become emblematic of activism that seeks to highlight and shame politically-induced precarisation. Precarity, the home and intimate governance practices therefore interconnect to produce a compounded and multivalent socio-political picture, whereby citizens are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed through political rhetoric that moralises the homespace, and those living within the home. Domicidal policies are enacted upon those figured as socially deviant, the policies justified as pragmatic and fair. And precarity becomes an entrenched condition of the everyday, whereby the rolling back of welfare services, although impacting on the majority of citizens, is publicly understood as rational economic decision-making in light of an austerity-induced housing crisis.

Conclusions

This chapter has outlined the three conceptual frameworks that lie at the core of this research: critical geographies of home, intimate governance, and precarity. Throughout the thesis, the home and precarity consistently meet at varying intersections of squatters and social tenants' stories. From the (re)consolidation of squatters and social tenants as socially deviant in the contemporary era (Chapter 5); to the multifaceted ways in which the home and homemaking capacities are dismantled by section 144 and the bedroom tax (Chapters 6 and 7); to the ways in which squatters and social tenants formulate ingenious resistances to the policies, with the homespace often at the centre of their activism (Chapter 7); intimate governance, the home and precarity are continually outlined as intrinsically linked issues. More specifically, the remainder of the thesis analyses the role and impact of section 144 and the bedroom tax, and their wider socio-political implications, in three ways:

Firstly, I seek to understand the ways in which longstanding and ever-evolving political rhetoric has sought to justify the increased precarisation of particular societal figures through the medium of the homespace. By constructing squatters and social tenants as socially deviant and thus a threat to the continued reification of the 'good citizen', the right to home becomes diluted, and the entrenchment of precarity justified.

Secondly, I explore the multifaceted ways in which precarity becomes entrenched and compounded into the homespace via section 144 and the bedroom tax. Experiences such as forced eviction, depression and shame detrimentally impact the homelives of squatters and social tenants. The home becomes an altered space, a site of fear and uncertainty, an embodiment of precarity.

Thirdly, I connect precarity and the home in relation to grassroots and subversive resistance to section 144 and the bedroom tax. I argue that the home becomes an integral site through which activism is played out in a variety of mediums, with the home forming a crucial site through which squatters and social tenants utilise precarity as a means of restoring their agency.

Conceptually, therefore, this thesis makes the argument that our understandings of the home as a political site must be extended through strengthening the connections between the home, intimate governance and precarity. Through the case studies of section 144 and the bedroom tax, Chapters 5-8 outline the ways in which the home is both utilised as a means of moralising and justifying austerity agendas and thus an embedded state of precarity, and simultaneously provides a site of resistance.

The following chapter examines the multiple methodologies utilised in order to further understand the relationship between home, intimate governance and precarity in relation to section 144 and the bedroom tax.

Chapter 4

Navigating the researcher/activist nexus: a personal account of the research process

This chapter is the behind the scenes moment of the thesis, acknowledging and deconstructing both the methodological process of the research, and my own positionality as a researcher. Through revealing the personal challenges and ever-evolving process of developing methodological approaches in qualitative research, the focus of this chapter lies in the acknowledgement of the ‘messiness’ of the research process: that qualitative research is inherently complex, multifaceted, and at times spontaneous (Katz 2013). The chapter therefore highlights the myriad ways in which my methodological approach has impacted and informed my research outcomes, as well as assessing my personal struggles with the project – particularly in terms of negotiating the researcher/activist nexus.

The chapter is divided into two distinct parts. Part one outlines the logic behind selecting London as a research site, before discussing the methodologies utilised in depth. Beginning with the successes and pitfalls of the recruitment process, the chapter outlines my participants and recruitment methods, before providing an assessment of my three key research methods. Firstly, semi-structured interviews with multiple stakeholders. Secondly, critical discourse analysis of key political speeches. Part one concludes by highlighting a third methodological approach, political ethnography. I examine the ways in which my own personal and political relationships with both participants and the thesis subject matter encouraged a more ethnographic approach during the course of the research process.

Part two further explores my positionality within the research process, beginning with a critique of the ‘insider/outsider’ binary prevalent in early feminist critiques of qualitative research. I go on to reflect upon my

own struggle not to fall into an 'activist/academic' essentialist trap, and explore the tensions between rejecting simplistic notions of who is an activist and who an academic. At the same time, I acknowledge the residing urge to 'do more' in the context of conducting a research project that focuses on social injustice. Part two also reflects on my positionality in relation to the impact of emotion, both on participants and myself as researcher. This is a particularly pertinent point to consider when the nature of the research project inevitably meant that I was at times asking people to share with me painful stories of eviction, indebtedness and discrimination. During this section I also acknowledge and discuss the ways in which this emotionality inevitably impacted upon the interpretation and analysis of my findings.

Part two also explores the ethical quandaries that presented themselves to me throughout the research process. Firstly, I acknowledge the particular ethical concerns of conducting research with people that may be engaged in illegal activity (the prominent concern expressed during the ethical approval procedure being my potential engagement with people squatting in residential buildings). Whilst risk within research should be mitigated as best as possible, in my case by ensuring I had a strong understanding of my legal obligations and refrained from involving myself in any illegal activity, it can never be removed entirely from the research process. I argue that researchers should not be put off exploring the lives of people engaged in illegal activity if their research seeks to contribute to furthering socio-political understandings and implications of these groups or activities. Finally, I reflect upon what I considered to be one of the more ethically concerning elements of the research process: part of the ethics procedure itself. I highlight the ways in which, through singling squatters out as figures of concern, the ethical approval process inadvertently compounded and contributed to figurations of the squatter as a deviant criminal; one of the very figurations I have sought to both address and challenge throughout this thesis.

This chapter ultimately seeks to reveal the myriad ways in which this thesis has been produced, by both myself, my participants, my research institution, and all the spaces in between.

Part one: where, how and why? Outlining the research process

London as a research site

Although both the bedroom tax and section 144 were implemented across the entirety of England and Wales, London was chosen as a specific research site for the project. There were two predominant logics that lay behind this decision. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 1, although the housing crisis takes many guises across the entirety of the UK, it is particularly extreme in the capital (Dorling 2014). Historically low housebuilding and an ever dwindling social housing stock is compounded by drastically soaring house prices. By 2016, house prices had risen by 39 per cent since pre-recession levels, rising by 13.9 per cent from March 2015-16 alone (Nationwide 2014; Government Land Registry 2016). The average house price in London is now over £534,785: this is nearly three times higher than the average house price in England and Wales as a whole (£189,901) (Government Land Registry 2016). The growing unaffordability of the capital, and the ever expanding inequality between rich and poor (Danny Dorling has cited London as the most unequal city in the developed world) therefore situates the capital as an integral research site in understanding the effect of Coalition housing policy on the UK's lowest income citizens (Dorling 2011).

Whilst the bedroom tax has affected households across England and Wales, a large proportion (over 55,000 of the approximately 500,000 total households affected) are situated in London (National Housing Federation 2014; Department for Work and Pensions 2015c). And whilst

proportionally this is less than other parts of the country, the high cost of rent in London means that social tenants in receipt of housing benefit lose far more in rent in the capital than in any other part of the country (Department for Work and Pensions 2015c). This inevitably leaves them at greater risk of arrears, indebtedness and eviction. This, coupled with growing concerns around the increasing displacement of social tenants in London via profit-oriented regeneration schemes (see for example Campkin 2013; Watt 2013; Lees 2014), the struggles of social tenants affected by the bedroom tax are clearly aligned with the wider consequences of social cleansing in the city.

Equally, London was a logical choice in terms of analysis of section 144, due to the fact that the squatting scene in the UK is very much concentrated in London. It must be noted here that reliable data on squatter numbers and their whereabouts is difficult to obtain due to the hidden and transient nature of squatting as a practice (particularly in the post-section 144 landscape). Although 20,000 is the most widely cited estimate (Ministry of Justice 2011) – prior to beginning my research I had been engaged in several conversations with existing contacts connected to squatting both locally and nationally. All informed me that squatting outside of London tended to be far lower in numbers, and far more fragmented in nature. This colloquial advice from those engaged in squatting, along with secondary knowledge of London as a long-standing hub of squatting culture since the post-war era, reaffirmed my decision to base the research project within the capital (Platt 1999; Finchett-Maddock 2014; Reeve 2015).

Initially, I had decided to focus my research on four boroughs in two key areas of inner London; Hackney and Tower Hamlets in the east of the city, and Lambeth and Southwark in the south-west. This was due to the fact that all four boroughs were some of the areas in London most affected by the bedroom tax (National Housing Federation 2013). Both areas are also well known as sites of both historical and contemporary squatting scenes, for example the decades-long squatted community on Brixton's

Rushcroft Road. However, once I began conducting my research, it quickly became apparent that an approach focusing on a few specific boroughs would ultimately be counter-productive to the aims of the project. As the research progressed, my focus altered slightly as it became clear the policies, particularly in relation to section 144, regularly incur the forced eviction (or threat of eviction) of low-income Londoners from their homes. Therefore, the squatters and social tenants that are the focus of this project have become far more precarious, and therefore transient, populations. Squatters in particular have seen their ability to safely move into and remain in squats without eviction and/or arrest vastly reduced as a consequence of section 144. The law change has led to the already fluid and transient nature of their home lives to become all the more so. It therefore no longer seemed logical to contain my research site within so few boroughs when so many, in particular squatters, are forced to move constantly from one home, and one borough, to the next. In this sense, decisions around my methodological approaches became intertwined with the everyday precarity of my research participants – in order to conduct research with transient populations, the researcher must detach understandings of the research site as static. As later chapters explore in detail, the transience of squatter populations is key in understanding both the domicidal implications of section 144, and the ways in which this very same transience is utilised as a method of resistance.

Although I restructured the remit of my research site, I did however tend to retain a focus on London's inner boroughs²⁹, rather than the city as a whole³⁰. This decision was made on the basis that the wider phenomenon of social cleansing taking place in the capital tends to see

²⁹ By 'inner London' I am referring to the 13 boroughs that fall within the boundaries of the former London County (Office for National Statistics and the National Archives 2016).

³⁰ There is one exception to this, the Grow Heathrow squat in Sipson, near Heathrow Airport. Despite its suburban location, the longevity of the squat, and their longstanding legal struggles to maintain their home, the stories of its residents felt too important not to tell.

the movement of people from inner London into outer London (and beyond). Indeed, the broadsheet newspaper *The Independent* published figures in 2015 revealing that 50,000 households were moved out of borough between 2012-15 (The Independent 2015). Indeed, the focus of many campaign groups has centred on the battle of low-income groups retaining their right to remain in the inner city (see for example the Focus E15 campaign, one of the foci of Chapter 8). The decision to retain a focus on inner London boroughs was also informed by the fact that the vast majority of participating squatters, and squats most present within the media, tended to be in inner London boroughs, and that the inner London boroughs tended to fare worse from the impact of the bedroom tax (National Housing Federation 2013). Research was therefore ultimately conducted across nine inner London boroughs; Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Lambeth, Wandsworth, Westminster, Camden, Islington and Haringey.

Recruitment methods, recruitment struggles

Prior to detailing my research methodologies, I see it as integral to understanding the research process in full that an engagement with recruitment methods is equally attended to. Participant recruitment is often one of the most challenging, yet little discussed, elements of the research process. It has brought with it moments of frustration at lack of access, moments left standing on Camden street corners waiting for a participant who never shows up; as well as moments of joy and relief as a particular strategy suddenly yields a number of ideal interviewees. It is in acknowledgement of the 'behind the scenes' element of this chapter that the following section details the recruitment process undertaken throughout this research.

My predominant research method consisted of semi-structured interviews with a range of individuals; social tenants affected by the

bedroom tax, squatters, housing charity and housing association employees, local authority councillors, and housing activists (see Appendix I for a list of participants). Participants were recruited through several avenues. Initial recruitment consisted of; utilising existing contacts; internet research and emailing potential participants; and posting requests for participants on relevant social media sites. These techniques proved a crucial means of participant recruitment throughout the research process.

Some recruitment methods were also influential in their impact on research findings themselves. In particular, through recruiting participants via social media groups set up to support people affected by the bedroom tax, I unearthed an effective method of resistance to the bedroom tax, a story central to Chapter 8. Although I had initially approached these social media sites as a means of recruiting participants, regularly reading posts from the groups also highlighted the ways in which social tenants, too, were recruiting one another to form a grassroots activist movement that has revolved around legally challenging individual cases of the bedroom tax. As is discussed in Chapter 8, social tenants affected by the bedroom tax have been collating information on successful appeals in order to encourage others to challenge the circumstances under which they have been penalised. This has in part contributed to larger legal challenges against the bedroom tax in both the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal.

In another example, all social tenants affected by the bedroom tax that I recruited to participate in the research were female. Whilst not intentional on my part, this is perhaps indicative of gendered understandings of the home and homemaking, with women broadly understood in social, cultural and political rhetoric as innately connected to domestic life. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, participants affected by the bedroom tax at times framed their fear and anger around the implementation of the bedroom tax around their position as mothers, that they felt they could no longer protect their children from everyday

hardship as a consequence of the policy. In Chapter 8, too, activism against forced eviction was conducted through the lens of the home as a site of motherhood and the familial. The Focus E15 campaign in particular has been regularly framed through media rhetoric in relation to the group's origins as a collaboration between young single mothers fighting for their rights to home. The dominance of female social tenant interviewees therefore highlights that the traditional frameworks of the meaning home as a gendered site of motherhood and the familial alongside the home as an inherently political site are present before the interview has even begun (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Brickell 2012a; 2014).

A focus on recruitment methods, then, has proved within my research to be an integral means not only of better understanding the ways in which research practice is formed, but as a set of decisions that actively shape research findings. As the following section highlights in particular, giving greater attention to participant recruitment is therefore integral in furthering conceptualisations of methodological decision-making.

Shaping research through snowballing

Once I had conducted interviews with initial participants, somewhat inevitably participant 'snowballing' became one of my predominant recruitment methods, whereby one participant would suggest and introduce me to potential future interviewees (Valentine 2005). Snowballing techniques are commonly used in qualitative research, but rarely discussed through a critical lens. There is a tendency among researchers to compartmentalise recruitment techniques as a technical necessity within the research process, rather than as a revealing methodological process in and of itself. However, as Noy demonstrates, snowballing techniques in and of themselves help to reveal the social networks and relationships that exist within a research remit; that to use

snowballing methods is to partake in the 'dynamics of...organic social networks' (Noy 2008: 329). Through tracing these social networks, and relying heavily on the reliability and good will of existing participants, snowballing also creates space for participants themselves to have an implicit input in the design of the research (Heckathorn 1997; Noy 2008). This technique therefore grounds the research process, and by proxy the research findings, in a more participatory context, challenging assertions made by Thrift and others that interviewing as a method is inherently problematic due to its production of research that is solely representational (Thrift 2000). Indeed, snowballing is a particularly intuitive sampling process when research takes place among 'hidden' populations, or those whose experiences and opinions are not validated by society, and where a sense of trust between researcher and participant is all the more vital, yet all the more complex to establish (Browne 2005). Snowballing is particularly valuable in these circumstances as it enables participants in potentially vulnerable and precarious positions to deploy a measure of agency in determining the direction of the research: an integral process in the representational/participatory methodological nexus so often debated in the social sciences (Kindon et al 2007).

It should of course be acknowledged that snowballing as a recruitment method is inherently biased, as the researcher is limited to participants' relevant connections, and groups are likely to be over-represented as participants are likely to have contacts with similar social, economic, political and cultural backgrounds to themselves (Beauchemin and Gonzalez-Ferrer 2011). However, whilst this was often true of my research participants, particularly in relation to squatters, it nonetheless remained the most effective means of making contact with potential participants. This is due to the fact that much of the squatting scene in London is relatively close-knit: if you are a squatter in the city, the chances are that you will know many other squatters and be connected to advisory services and political networks that also have large squatting cohorts. In what is a relatively small subculture in the city, being granted

access to squatters and their crews through participants' connections was an efficient and meaningful method of understanding squatting as an urban network.

There is also arguably an inherent bias in snowballing as a technique in relation to recruiting participants affected by the bedroom tax. This is due to the fact that those willing to respond to my calls for participants (predominately on social media support sites and through tenant and resident association websites) were more likely to have had negative experiences that they wished to share. For example, people who join social media support sites are unlikely to have positive stories to recount of the bedroom tax³¹. This was in part combatted by also conducting interviews with various stakeholders, for example housing association employees (to be discussed as a method in more detail later in the chapter). Establishing a wide variety of perspectives beyond the experiences of social tenants and squatters alone enabled me to consolidate and expand my findings and in part mitigate the bias present within snowballing methods.

Ultimately, in the context of my research, I found snowballing to be an effective aid, both in developing my understandings of the various social interconnections held by my participants, and in building relationships with participants who may have been unwilling to disclose sensitive information had they not seen me as connected to prior participants, who they knew in either personal or professional capacities. Snowballing as a somewhat organic expression of the social linkages between participants was particularly interesting and valid in light of my use of a multi-stakeholder approach. Snowballing connected me to people through routes I had not previously considered, and removed some initial assumptions I had made. Here I refer in particular to social tenants affected by the bedroom tax and squatters being compartmentalised in

³¹ Although Chapter 7 does include an account of Maria's generally positive experience of the bedroom tax, whereby the policy ultimately enabled her to establish a fresh start away from a home imbued with difficult memories and familial loss.

my understanding as existing in separate social and political networks within London. Snowball sampling highlighted that in fact these two worlds were more intertwined than I had imagined them to be, thus further cementing justification for approaching the thesis with a focus on two at first seemingly disparate policies. For example, on hearing I was also researching the criminalisation of squatting, two social tenant participants reminisced about their own experiences of squatting during their twenties; and squatting crews I spoke with regularly aligned themselves with wider activism around the housing crisis and the social cleansing of social tenants in London³².

Snowballing also assisted me greatly in both my ability to access participants, and in establishing some sense of connection with participants through my already having formed relationships with people that they also knew. This was especially integral within the context of my research and the need to develop trust between myself and participants, as conversation would regularly touch upon highly sensitive issues, such as financial and emotional trauma brought about by the bedroom tax, or experiences of arrest and/or illegal activity (the ethics of which are discussed in further detail in a later section of this chapter).

However, it would be a highly edited account of my experience of participant recruitment were I not to acknowledge the times where I struggled to find people willing to participate in the research. Whilst snowballing proved an invaluable technique in creating a sense of momentum, establishing trusting relationships, and allowing insights into inter-connected social networks, there were invariably times where all routes to participants felt as if they had disappeared. In some instances, the situation was all the more disheartening when making contact was not the issue; rather the struggle emanated from the negative responses I occasionally received from those I had invited to

³² See Chapter 8 for a detailed account of the relationship between social housing and squatting as a method of resistance.

participate. One particularly memorable and difficult experience occurred when I posted a call for further participants on a social media discussion forum for people affected by the bedroom tax. As this was a technique I had used several times before without issue, I therefore paid little thought to the potential for negative responses. I posted on the forum, explaining who I was, outlining the intentions of the research, and what would be asked of anyone who wished to participate. When I returned to the site to check for responses an hour or so later, I was met with an angry comment from a forum member, who responded to my request with the following;

“Personally, [I think that] other peoples suffering is not material for advancing your degree, No one really knows who you are and what you will ultimately do with any information you garner”³³

To receive such a negative reaction was disheartening; however, it is also to be somewhat expected as a potential outcome of the recruitment process in light of the sensitive nature of my research. In order to attempt to combat the emergence of situations like this one, throughout the recruitment process I always ensured I was open as to who I was, what the research project focused on, its intended outcomes, and assured anonymity for participants and the opportunity to withdraw participation at any time. This incident however highlighted the impossibility of mitigating all potential moments of conflict or distrust felt towards me in my position as researcher. Such situations also caused me many an anxious night agonising over my feelings of helplessness in

³³ I dealt with the incident by responding to the comment made by the forum member, apologising if I had offended them, but reiterating that my reasons for embarking on the research project was to highlight the atrocious impact of the bedroom tax and other Coalition government housing reforms, and to contribute my voice to a wider housing activist community.

my position as a researcher, as opposed to an activist, a topic to be discussed in more detail in a later section of this chapter.

Interestingly, the forum member's reaction ultimately evolved into an unintended form of snowball sampling, as another member who had disagreed with the criticism of my post subsequently contacted me offering to participate in the project. This outcome only furthers the socially organic element of snowballing as a sampling method. Perhaps akin to having an argument at a party and another guest stepping in to take your side, the social interconnections between the angry respondent and the future participant still served, albeit unexpectedly, as a pathway to recruitment and the formation of a relationship with a new participant. This incident is an illustration of the inevitable, and yet often ignored, 'messiness' and everydayness of the research process itself; that fieldwork is made by the researcher, the participant, and all the spaces in between (England 1994; Katz 2013). That behind every polished final research output lies a web of enraged phone calls to friends, hours left waiting for participants that never show up, euphoric eureka moments at the pub, and regular stages of feeling that the research process will never reach a satisfactory end. To discount or ignore these processes, no matter how messy or unappealing, and move directly to the presentation of a perfected finished product is to deny the lessons learned and pathways taken that are key in how we evolve as social researchers. Understanding and acknowledging the difficulties and stumbling blocks that are part and parcel of recruitment and research processes is integral in the encouragement of a culture of honesty and reflexivity in research, and attends to the complexities and politics of the everyday and the mundane that have a striking impact on how we conceptualise the world and conduct research with and about our fellow humans: in short, the mundane, everyday frustrations and victories associated with the research process matter.

The following sections outline and justify the multiple research methods used throughout this thesis.

Semi-structured interviews: ‘conversation with a purpose’

Semi-structured interviews formed a key methodological approach throughout the research project. Two presiding logics lay behind this decision. Firstly, a desire to conduct conversations that are both directly applicable to my original research questions, whilst simultaneously enabling greater contribution to the project from participants. Secondly, this method complimented a multi-stakeholder approach that has been integral to my research design and implementation.

Through both the initial recruitment processes and snowball sampling outlined above, I conducted interviews with twenty-five participants; nine squatters, seven social tenants affected by the bedroom tax, and nine other stakeholders. Stakeholders (to be discussed in further detail in a later section of this chapter), included activists, employees of housing associations, local authorities, and housing charities. I met with several participants on multiple occasions, both formally to re-interview them and informally at various events and meetings due to my growing involvement in the housing activist movement.

One of the primary reasons semi-structured interviews were chosen as the dominant method in this research project is that they enable ‘conversation with a purpose’, allowing for some mutual control of the conversation between researcher and participant, and contributing to a balance between representation and participation (Burgess 1984, in Mason 2002). Whilst it must be acknowledged that interviews will inevitably always be representative of participant experiences, I argue that this far from renders such a technique invalid (Thrift 2000). This is due to the fact that ultimately nearly all forms of research, unless perhaps approached from an auto-ethnographic or autobiographical perspective, are representations of experience. What semi-structured interviews in particular are able to contribute to the relationship between interviewer and participant is a partial reconfiguration of the power imbalance that

commonly lurks within social sciences research. While interviews enable the researcher to focus on key issues that they deem most significant, a semi-structured style redresses this somewhat by granting participants room to press their own agendas and highlight concerns they see as fundamental to their experiences. Semi-structured interviews therefore create integral spaces 'in-between' the researcher and the researched that are integral for the co-production of knowledge (Hitchings 2012).

Semi-structured interviews were invaluable to this research for two reasons. Firstly, I was able to ensure that key themes that related to the project as a whole were discussed during the interview (Longhurst 2010). Prior to beginning the interview process, I outlined four key areas of enquiry;

- *Background and immediate impact*- The impact of the policy (section 144, the bedroom tax or both) on the participant's life. This impact could be either personal, professional, or both, depending on who the participant was. The impact I referred to could be answered in terms of financial or emotional impacts (or both).
- *Timing and justification*- Participants' opinions of the timing and public reasoning behind the Coalition government's decision to implement these policies.
- *Public perceptions*- How, if at all, participants felt the policies had impacted on public perceptions of squatters/social tenants.
- *Resistance and future predictions*- What participants predicted for the future. This was framed in relation to the general election that took place in May 2015; whether they felt the situation was likely to deteriorate further in the aftermath of the election; if they were involved in any resistance movements; and if so whether they felt they were likely to prove successful.
- *The 'other figure'*- If participants were squatters, I also asked them about their opinions of the bedroom tax as a policy, and the impact they felt it had had, both on those directly affected, and on

public perceptions of social tenants more widely. If participants were social tenants affected by the bedroom tax, then I asked them the same questions in relation to section 144 and squatters. For other stakeholders, these questions were asked in relation to whichever policy they had less or no experience or expertise in.

However, alongside ensuring that the key themes I deemed integral to the research were addressed during conversations with participants, I found the semi-structured approach equally important in allowing participants to contribute key ideas and areas of concern that I had not outlined in my initial research questions (Kitchin and Tate 2000). This was integral in shaping and expanding my understandings of the impact of the two policies, in some cases affirming my assumptions around the kinds of impacts experienced by participants, for example social tenants internalising negative public figurations of themselves as societal parasites through self-shaming language (Caldeira 2001). In other instances, however, engaging in a relatively open-ended dialogue with participants opened up new avenues of conceptualisation and understanding of the two policies that I would not otherwise have considered. For example, one participant who was particularly difficult to keep focused on the key themes of the conversation due to a tendency to drift into extended philosophical tangents, in the end brought me to a key concept in my research that I had not considered before meeting him. During our conversation, Harry referred to himself as an occupier, rather than a squatter, and proceeded to discuss in detail his role in the Occupy movement in London, and how even when squatting for economic and pragmatic means, he ultimately saw this as an extension of his role as a political occupier, rather than a squatter. The resulting strand of thought that occurred after this encounter, which led to a pivotal part of my discussion in Chapter 8, may well have never come into being had I been more stringent in my interviewing technique, and not allowed for conversational tangents to occur.

The multi-stakeholder approach

The second predominant logic that lay behind my decision to conduct research primarily through a semi-structured interview approach was the importance of developing a multi-stakeholder perspective. In the context of this project and its presiding aims, I felt that collecting stories about section 144 and the bedroom tax and their impact on London was best approached through recruiting a wide range of participants with an array of positions and roles within and around the policies and London's housing landscape more broadly. Reasoning behind this decision lay in my desire to understand the varied and wide-reaching impacts of the policies, and the ways in which they have contributed to a larger, multivalent crisis of affordable housing and social cleansing in London. Through conversations with not only squatters and social tenants affected by the bedroom tax, but other actors involved, such as housing charity and housing association employees, solicitors and activists, I was able to highlight a wide array of impacts, understandings, and future concerns regarding the two policies.

Constructing the squatter and the social tenant: critical discourse analysis as method

Alongside semi-structured interviews, critical discourse analysis was also employed as a secondary methodology. The use of critical discourse analysis emerged from my focus on the multi-stakeholder approach discussed above that sought to draw on many varied perspectives, a process termed triangulation (a phrase human geographers have borrowed from surveying, in which triangulation describes using different bearings to ascertain a correct level or position) (Valentine 2005).

Critical discourse analysis seeks to deconstruct the ways in which accounts of citizenship are affected, invoked and implemented, revealing a 'buried ideology' through analysing and critiquing the relationship between power structures, language, and knowledge discourse (Meer et al 2010; Machin and Mayr 2012). This engages a Foucauldian discussion around the interplay between these various components of political discourse and the ways in which they are implemented through the governance of citizens (Foucault 1991; Rose 2000). Critical discourse analysis in this context therefore provided an appropriate secondary methodology within this research project. Much of the presiding discussion throughout the thesis takes place through an understanding of the development of the figuration of the squatter and the social tenant as abject, deviant citizens; figurations that are distinctly produced and maintained through a framework of particular rhetoric that constructs them as such. These figurations in particular have been implemented via political speeches and statements, and national media output. Longstanding constructions of both squatters and social tenants as abject and politically unproductive citizens have subsequently fed into the introduction of policies such as section 144 and the bedroom tax, and into the ways in which squatters and social tenants construct themselves³⁴. Critical discourse analysis, then, fundamentally contributes to understanding the impact of political rhetoric on social cleansing and the demonisation of the poor in London.

Although an often-utilised methodology in social sciences research, critical discourse analysis remains somewhat elusive in terms of practically outlining how to undertake it 'in the field'. Indeed, as Wodak and Meyer note, critical discourse analysis 'does not constitute a well-defined empirical methodology but rather a bulk of approaches with theoretical similarities and research questions of a specific kind' (2009: 27). Attempting to define critical discourse analysis as methodology invokes both its complexity as a school of thought, and its entrenchment

³⁴ These issues are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

within societal power structures – in short, it at times becomes difficult to pinpoint exactly where critical discourse analysis is taking place. This is perhaps not surprising when we consider that critical discourse analysis is in many ways the process of making explicit the implicit, of drawing out the rationale of that which is inherent in the everyday. Therefore, quantifying this process and separating it from other methodologies can be difficult. As Hoggart et al note, using critical discourse analysis is a ‘craft skill; something like bike riding, which is not easy to render or describe in an explicit manner’ (2002: 165). Indeed, throughout my research analysis, I in general tended to critique and discuss texts (predominately in the form of political speeches) in order to add depth of analysis via case studies that helped to further highlight findings drawn out from conversations with participants, rather than as the predominant source of analysis in and of themselves. Whilst this is undoubtedly a hierarchical use of multiple methodologies, this is not a negative admission. Using critical discourse analysis as a secondary methodology allowed me to complement the core questions and aims of my research. Through analysis of political speeches, both by David Cameron and other coalition politicians such as Mike Weatherley, and more historical examples such as era defining speeches by Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher, a stronger understanding of the origins of both section 144 and the bedroom tax was able to develop throughout the thesis. This secondary use of critical discourse analysis therefore compounded and further emphasised the findings that emerged from interviews with participants, particularly when assessing the ways in which pre-existing constructions of squatters and social tenants contributed to the implementation of the bedroom tax and section 144.

Political ethnography

Alongside the methodologies I initially chose for this project, a third key methodology was established and developed throughout the research process. As time progressed, my understanding of section 144, the bedroom tax, and the broader housing crisis in London began to be shaped not only through the interviews I conducted and the speeches I analysed. Hearing the experiences of squatters and social tenants, and regularly reading the ways in which they are consistently undermined in political rhetoric began in part to encourage me to myself take part in housing activism. During my time as a doctoral researcher, I volunteered for a housing activist conglomerate, and was invited to give talks at various squatting-centric housing conferences and discussion days due to the increasing connections made with the communities I was researching. I attended many rallies and protests whose aim was to demand an improvement in Londoners' housing circumstances (including the 2015 March for Homes, the 2016 Housing Bill protest, and numerous marches led by Focus E15 in 2015 and 2016). As I became more personally involved in the issues I was researching, my analysis and understanding of my research participants therefore began to alter and expand, with several key stories within the following chapters emanating not solely from organised semi-structured interviews or speeches that I had decided to focus on, but also from events that I attended and conversations that I had while there³⁵. Over the three-year research period, I inevitably became more and more immersed in the housing crisis and its activism beyond the confines of my original research questions.

³⁵ This is particularly true of Chapter 8, where both the examples of social media groups legally challenging the bedroom tax, and discussion of the relationship between squatting and wider housing activism came out of regularly following events relating to the bedroom tax, attending events, and having casual conversations with other academics and housing activists alongside more structured pre-arranged interviews.

My engagement with various forms of housing activism can be understood as a form of political ethnography. Along with semi-structured interviews and critical discourse analysis, a political ethnography approach centres on ascertaining the varying power relations and dynamics that both construct unequal socio-political landscapes, and explores the ways in which such dynamics are tested and challenged (Schatz 2009; Forrest 2017).

Specifically, my participation in a multitude of events and activities sought to ascertain the multifaceted ways in which section 144 and the bedroom tax specifically, and the punitive treatment of citizens deemed non-normative more broadly, were confronted and resisted. This occurred at varying scales and via an array of methods (as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8). From well-publicised demonstrations in central London, to small gatherings in Oxford squats, participation and immersion in such activities enabled me to further identify and dissect the myriad ways in which Coalition housing policy incites subversive responses.

It is via this engagement with political ethnography that the empirics collated during the research process have in many sections of the coming chapters been written as stories or vignettes, rather than being based solely on interviews and critical discourse analysis methods. Rather than a project that seeks to formalise and code findings, my immersion in the field instead produced an understanding of my research findings based on colloquial, as well as formal, encounters. Key issues emerged along the way as a consequence of both conversations I had with participants and my own personal experiences, rather than the research process being a regimented tick-box exercise whereby I ensured only that all original research questions were answered.

As the second section of this chapter highlights in more detail, the acknowledgement and analysis of researcher positionality is an integral part of better contextualising the research process and final thesis within wider social contexts, beyond solely the original intentions of the author. In a research context that is very much politically charged and ever-changing, it felt integral to commit to contributing to housing activism. It therefore became somewhat inevitable that these experiences, as well as the interviews conducted and speeches analysed, helped to inform my

research findings. The following section explores issues of positionality further, in particular examining my navigation of the researcher/activist binary, the impact of emotion in qualitative research and the ethics of working with vulnerable populations. Finally, the chapter concludes by examining the ethics of university ethics procedure in and of itself.

Part two: positionality and ethics

Having mapped out the methodological processes undertaken during this research project, the second part of this chapter reflexively accounts my own positionality within the research. The final section of the chapter considers the ethical quandaries faced during the research process; in particular focusing on questioning the ethical issues that emerged as a consequence of the university research ethics procedure itself, and its potential to further instil the negative figurations of squatters, an integral theme throughout this thesis.

Moving on from an 'insider/outsider' binary

Feminist geographers have long argued for the importance of reflexivity both during and after the research process, emphasising the need to acknowledge the impact that a researcher's own positionality will inevitably have on both the research process and the analysis of findings. Moving on from naturalist portrayals of the research process that present findings and analyses as 'truth', the feminist turn in geography brought to the methodological foreground the understanding that a singular truth can never be extracted from human research (Graham 2005; Valentine 2005). However, this initial movement towards reflexivity in the research process was critiqued for falling into an essentialist trap by structuring itself within an 'insider/outsider' binary.

This is due to the prevailing understanding of researcher positionality during early feminist accounts being focused on the idea that one is either an 'insider' and therefore not able to separate oneself from the researched; or an 'outsider', and therefore incapable of grasping any true understanding of the area being researched (Rose 1997).

More recent discussion of reflexivity in qualitative research processes has focused on the research process as an ongoing act of performativity, critiquing the 'insider/outsider' binary and arguing that relationships between researcher and researched, and the positionality (or positionalities) of the researcher within this process are multivalent, flexible and fluid (see Mohammad 2001; Valentine 2002; Crang 2003; Davies and Dwyer 2007). This acknowledgement of the complex relationship between researchers and their research subjects, and the multiple forms of positionality we may take throughout the research process has helped to redefine how knowledge is produced within human geography (Davies and Dwyer 2007). Such conversations are foregrounded in a Foucauldian understanding of knowledge as produced and maintained within distinct power relations (Foucault 1991). As researchers, it is vital we remember that we are an integral part of these knowledge productions and power relations, and that we are obligated both to highlight and critique these power relations and acknowledge our own place within them (Maxey 1999). Through continually and consciously working to acknowledge our multiple and continually changing positionalities within the research process, and bringing our experiences and the challenges of our positionalities to the academic table, the complex nature of social research becomes one that is better understood.

The following sections discuss the two predominant challenges of positionality that emerged during my research. Firstly, the tensions between research and activism and the trap of the 'activist/academic' binary, and secondly the emotionality of conducting research that at times asks for highly personal accounts of traumatic life events.

Activism and research: how to be both?

As the vast majority of my research participants consisted of both people affected by the criminalisation of squatting and/or the bedroom tax, and other stakeholders that are working to reduce the impact of these policies, activism and activist movements were a constant feature of the research process. Indeed, many of my participants were engaged in a variety of activist groups and activities related to housing and beyond – from a group whose remit demands the defence of London’s ever-dwindling social housing stock, to participants who are involved in the ongoing global Occupy movement. Throughout the research process I was in awe of the dedication and fearlessness of many of my participants. Some told me stories of confrontations with bailiffs and police³⁶, at times leading to arrest. Others spoke of organising rallies, marches, workshops, and other tireless efforts to bring about change in London’s housing system. The very embodied performative nature of many of my participants’ roles as activists at times left me feeling somewhat impotent in comparison. There were certainly moments when sat in a library reading room grappling with various theoretical conundrums that I could not help but think to myself that I should be writing less and ‘doing’ more (Askins 2009).

Of course, feeling this way threatened to lure me into the trap of an ‘insider/outsider’ binary that distinguishes activism as entirely separate from academia. As scholars have argued, it is often impossible to draw clear distinctions between the two (Routledge 1996; Maxey 1999). The two processes are often highly intertwined, with academics holding the ability to embrace ‘broad, inclusive visions of reflexivity and activism and applying them to our theory and practice’ (Maxey 1999: 202). Equally, activism is embedded in academic theories that seek to produce radical

³⁶ One particularly memorable story came from Ryan (a squatter participant), who told me he had been arrested for stealing a policeman’s hat during a protest.

change in society, traditionally through a Marxist lens (Fuller and Kitchin 2004). These overlaps have been referred to by Routledge as a 'third space', in which knowledge is produced collaboratively within and across academia and activism (Routledge 1996). These linkages between the two have been developed most overtly through the ongoing expansion of participatory action research as a key methodology in human geography. Participatory action research can be defined as a research process that places emphasis on the collaborative, non-hierarchical production of knowledge between the researcher and research participants (Pain 2004; Kindon et al 2007). Although I would not define my methodologies as participatory action research per se, as I took a more representational approach, I did take into account its principles. I did so by using semi-structured interviews as a means through which I relinquished some control of the conversation, enabling participants to direct me towards what they felt were the most pressing issues to be taken into account.

Certainly, one of the key reasons for beginning this research project was to highlight some of the atrocious outcomes of Coalition housing policy, and to add my voice to the contemporary housing activism movement in London that has emerged in the austerity era. However, my encounters with the many passionate and inspiring people I encountered throughout my research also encouraged me to expand my own approach to activism beyond this thesis alone. As a consequence, during the research process, I became gradually more involved in grassroots housing activism (although stopping far before the point of police confrontations or arrest...), attending housing rallies, marches and protests across London. I also began working part-time for a large national charity, developing publications reporting on the national housing crisis as part of a year-long lobbying campaign to improve housing rights for social and private renters. I also developed further research skills as a consequence of my relationship with activists, for example through being advised by

activists that I met to make use of the Freedom of Information Act³⁷ to gain further insights into the number of arrests under section 144. My decision to utilise the Act in my research would most likely not have occurred to me were it not for conversations with various housing activists who told me that they had used this method to gain important information not investigated or published in the mainstream media.

The continual journey of my ever-shifting positionality throughout the research process further highlights the importance of critiquing binary assumptions around who the researcher is and is not. However, it is also important to recognise that it was only through becoming concerned with these binaries that I developed a better understanding of these multivalent positionalities in the first place. Therefore, to discount the 'insider/outsider' binary entirely is to ignore the ways in which the existence of such binaries encourage the furthering of critical analysis of one's own place within such bounds, and develop an understanding of the varying ways in which our work as social scientists may help us to contribute across and between the fields of activism and academia.

The emotionality of the research process: conducting research with vulnerable people

Alongside grappling with the tensions between research and activism, I also struggled to deal with the emotionality of fieldwork: both in terms of my participants' emotions regarding the stories they were being asked to tell, and my own responses to the research process and findings. At times, particularly during the early stages of my research, I found it difficult to reconcile the fact that I was asking relative strangers to share

³⁷ The Freedom of Information Act 2000 enables public access to information held by public authorities. The Act in part enables members of the public to request information held by public institutions. I largely used the act to request information from the London Metropolitan Police in regards to the number of arrests under section 144 since its implementation.

with me potentially traumatic life events, delving into deeply intimate subject areas around the financial and emotional struggles they faced as a consequence of either section 144 or the bedroom tax, and asking them to reflect on how they felt they were perceived in the public psyche. As Smith (2014: 142) asks, 'how can the intimacies of fieldwork be translated to the written page without indulgence?'. How could I tell these at times traumatic stories in the most appropriate and effective way? These concerns have continuously followed me throughout the research process, as they well should. And yet it is these intimate conversations, these enraging and upsetting encounters, that perhaps need to be told the most, that I hope will contribute to the ever-growing body of research and activism that calls out housing, urban and class injustice in London and demands change. With this in mind, I have done my utmost to approach the research material with a sense of responsibility towards protecting both my participants and myself before, during and after interviews had taken place, and with the understanding that I have a social responsibility to engage others in what I have learned.

The emotive nature of the research content meant that I had an ethical duty to protect my participants by phrasing interview questions and topics carefully in order for relevant findings to emerge, whilst at the same time ensuring that participants were not distressed by the process (Bingley 2002). As a means of reducing any potential emotional distress on the part of the participant, prior to interview I ensured that I had made the intended areas of discussion clear, and assured participants that they would not have to answer anything they felt uncomfortable with. Equally, and specifically in regards to participants who had been directly affected by the policies, during the interview I would again reassure them that they did not have to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with before beginning a particularly difficult topic. I also made sure to highlight to interviewees that they were able to opt out of participation in the research at any point, and that I would not include

quotes or references to their interviews within the thesis or any other publications if they decided that they no longer wanted me to do so. I felt that these tactics helped to mitigate any potential distress felt by participants during the research process.

However, due to the sensitive nature of the research, it remained unfortunately somewhat inevitable that on some occasions participants showed an element of discomfort prior to or during my interviews with them. For example, one participant affected by the bedroom tax who I had arranged to meet had a last minute change of heart and requested that she be interviewed via Facebook rather than face-to-face, as she was physically disabled, lived alone and did not want me to interview her at her home due to the fact that it would understandably make her feel vulnerable. Another participant, also a woman affected by the bedroom tax, was at first perturbed during our interview when I asked her what the impact of the policy had been on her life, asking me very guardedly whether I wanted her to give me a figure relating to how much debt she was in. In my asking this question I had not actually intended to receive an answer that involved any exact figures of indebtedness, but understandably my phrasing had led her to believe that this was what I wanted to know. Therefore, in spite of my best intentions, the highly emotive research topic did occasionally lead to participant unease.

These instances reveal that, no matter how well-intentioned, the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee remains an issue in need of acknowledgement and management as part of the research process. This is a seemingly unending quandary regarding the ethics of social sciences research. How do we attend to the power relations and imbalances embedded within knowledge production in academia (Evers 2010; Smith 2014)? These are questions that all researchers must navigate. We as researchers have a responsibility towards the varying relationships formed and stories told during the research process, and our position as researcher and their position as participant cannot and

should not be dismissed or explained away, but rather acknowledged and confronted.

So how to address this responsibility as a researcher? In both of the instances described above that had occurred directly as a result of the power imbalances present within the interview process, I made sure to mitigate the situation as sensitively as possible. In the first example, once I had assured the participant that I was more than happy to conduct the interview via Facebook, she felt much more comfortable discussing her experiences with me, and ultimately we had a highly engaging and emotive conversation whereby I felt confident that she felt comfortable with the exchange. In the case of the second example, I responded to my participant's unease by assuring her that I did not want to know any exact financial figures, and reiterated that she should in no way feel obliged to answer any questions she did not feel comfortable with. After my assurances, my participant became far more relaxed and trusting of my intentions (indeed, ultimately trusting me enough to share with me how much arrears she had fallen into as a consequence of the bedroom tax). These examples I argue highlight that the emotionality instigated by power imbalances within the research process cannot always be avoided. However, an acknowledgement of this inherent unevenness in the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, and a readiness to combat it as best as possible, can help to avoid research participants experiencing the interview negatively, and encourage participants to make clear what their boundaries are in terms of subject matter or other elements of the research process, such as meeting locations. I hope that in both of these instances, power imbalances were in some part restructured through participants establishing clearly defined boundaries with me, and connecting with the research material on their own terms.

The emotionality of the researcher

Alongside mitigating as best as possible any potential distress felt by participants, another, perhaps lessprecedented, outcome of the research process was acknowledging and coping with my own emotional reactions and responses (Askins 2009; Smith 2014). As Bondi et al note, as researchers, ‘clearly our emotions *matter*’ (Bondi et al 2007: 1). This is due both to the need to acknowledge and protect our own emotional wellbeing in the face of difficult research, and because our emotional reactions to the research process inevitably help to define its outcomes.

Although long neglected as a valid reflexive process within human geography, the emotionality of research has in recent decades begun to be taken seriously as an important contribution to academic discussion around researcher positionality (see for example Widdowfield 2000; Anderson and Smith 2001; Bondi et al 2007; Askins 2009; Smith 2014). Emotional geography has emerged as a key sub-discipline, some of the principal concerns of which are the creation of a space for reflexive theory and elucidating the importance of the everyday in understanding the socio-political (Tolia Kelly 2006; Askins 2016). In the context of my own research, the often intense emotions I felt on hearing sometimes heart-breaking, sometimes enraging, stories from my participants, has inevitably impacted and informed much of my resulting interpretation and analysis. The emotionality of both participants and researcher are therefore integral in determining the final outputs of any research project, as both researchers and participants are inevitably shaped by these emotional encounters and experiences. Acknowledging and exploring the emotionality of social research acts as an important reaffirmation of everyday encounters, emotions and reactions as integral sites through which we are both impacted by, and create, the political. This is a form of what Philo et al (2015) suggest might be understood as ‘civic geographies’; that geographers have a responsibility to address social, spatial and political injustices, and to connect with people beyond

the confines of the academy. The relationship between research and emotionality I argue plays a key role in this: that essentially, we need to get angry about what we are learning when we venture out to conduct research, and that that anger can contribute a productive voice in calls for justice.

Certainly, from my own experiences in undertaking this research project, it was the everyday stories of struggle, despair, resistance and reaction, that inevitably incited some of the most powerful responses in me and encouraged me to become more involved in activist causes beyond the researching and writing of this thesis. Such responses inevitably formed much of what is to follow in this thesis, and informed my wider understandings of the political processes that have enabled such personal and everyday experiences of domicile, intimate citizenship and precarity to occur.

The ethics of researching illegal activity

The final section of this chapter addresses ethical questions surrounding my research. I underwent a particularly rigorous process during the first year of my PhD in order to obtain ethical approval for the project. This was due to the fact that part of the research remit involved interviewing participants who would be potentially engaged in illegal activities. My university was particularly apprehensive about my wishing to interview squatters who may still be living in residential buildings, and therefore engaged in illegal activity. There was also concern around whether the commercial (and therefore still legal) squats that I would potentially enter as part of my research might be in unsafe or unstable buildings.

I was granted ethical approval on the basis that I assured the ethics committee I would take every precaution available; not entering buildings if they appeared to be unsafe, meeting participants in 'neutral' settings such as cafes or parks where appropriate, and ensuring that my

supervisor knew where and when I would be meeting participants, particularly if I was planning to visit a squat.

I also argued for the importance of freedom to conduct research with people potentially engaged in illegal activity on two grounds. Firstly, an assurance that my own legal obligation to disclose information about illegal activity is realistically very minimal, as:

There is no legal obligation to disclose information received relating to criminal activities unless legal proceedings or an investigation are underway. Even then, the confidant will only be guilty of perverting the course of justice if a researcher deliberately evades questioning. (Corti et al 2000: Section 3.2).

In the majority of instances, omitting to report or act on a crime being committed is highly unlikely to be deemed illegal (University of Brighton 2010). I was therefore able to legitimately assure the ethics committee that the risk of my being arrested or questioned by police at any point during the research process would be extremely minimal.

My second key argument when responding to the ethics committee was that the minimal risk the research may involve is justified by the validity of the project as a contribution to geographical research. The research aimed to fulfil a wider obligation, to my academic institution, to social sciences research, and to housing activism (British Sociological Association 2002). This project has sought to contribute to the expansion of analysis, discussion, and attention to the housing crisis prevailing in both London and the wider UK. If we as researchers are inhibited from addressing important issues of social justice such as this because of the existence of risk in our work, then therein may lie the true ethical danger. If the social sciences avoid particular research areas because there may be risk involved, then we are potentially closing the door on an entire swathe of important geographical sites and theoretical insights. It is the role of the researcher to explore in as unbounded a manner as possible

socio-political landscapes and their meanings in their many forms (Jacobs 2006). The willingness to accept that risk, to one degree or another, is inherently part of working with other people in a research setting should therefore be the starting point for ethical approval, with ethics committees seeking to mitigate risk and protect both researchers and participants as much as is feasible. Ultimately, this fortunately appeared to be the stance taken by my own college. My ethics application was approved and allowed me to proceed with the research on the mutual understanding that although I would reduce risk wherever possible, it would be something of a fallacy to assume that risk would always be entirely absent from the research process.

An ethical ethics procedure?

What I found both most fascinating, and ultimately most concerning, about the ethical approval procedure, however, was not related to my potentially encountering or being told about illegal activities by participants, but rather the ethical procedure in and of itself. This was in relation to the assumptions made about squatters during the ethical approval process. When completing the various ethics and risk assessment forms, I was asked to complete each form twice; once for social tenants affected by the bedroom tax and other stakeholders such as housing charity and housing association employees; and once for squatters. The logic behind the separation of squatters from other participants in the ethics process lay in the fact that my wish to interview squatters had been deemed to be particularly risky. I was asked in detail to provide evidence of how I would protect myself in unsafe squats, and how I would manage potentially being told about, or being witness to, squatter participants engaging in illegal activities. These were not questions that were raised in relation to any other participant type.

The separation of squatters from all other participant groups left me feeling somewhat uncomfortable. Why was there an assumption that squats would be more unsafe than any other home? And why did concerns around my being privy to illegal activities only emerge in relation to squatter participants? After all, anyone I spoke to throughout the research process, squatter or otherwise, could potentially be involved in some form of illegal activity – and could this not be true of most forms of research involving people? The assumptions made by the ethics committee appeared to me to be a manifestation within the college of a wider social prejudice that perceives squatters as inherently criminal, deviant figures that one should be wary of. This was a particularly interesting introduction to the research process, given that one of the key concerns of this thesis is the ways in which squatters and social tenants are morally framed as abject citizens in the public psyche. This manifests for squatters particularly in relation to moral justifications around the implementation of section 144 that were built around framing the squatter as inherently criminal (Middleton 2015; Reeve 2015). The presence of these same discourses that I had framed one of my major research themes around only cemented for me the necessity of conducting this research, in order to contribute to a critique of these dangerous rhetorical framings of particular groups. This is not to say that none of the squatters I spoke to were engaged in illegal activity; some had squatted in residential buildings since the September 2012 implementation of section 144, whilst others regularly ‘skipped’ (illegally retrieved food from supermarket bins) their meals. But of course, some participants other than squatters also engaged in low-grade criminal activity, for example smoking marijuana³⁸, or being arrested (and subsequently released without charge) whilst taking part in an anti-austerity protests. The ethical approval procedure for this

³⁸ Indeed, it was a participant affected by the bedroom tax, as opposed to a squatter, who spent the majority of our day together smoking joints, as its effects helped to reduce the pain caused by her arthritis and other chronic medical conditions.

research project was for me an early lesson in the importance of highlighting and critiquing the ways in which we all, including researchers and universities, internalise, regurgitate and replicate the moralistic rhetorics that are produced and maintained through technologies of governance (Foucault 1991; Rose 2000). We are, for example, told time and again through various mediums that squatters are inherently criminal: something that has now been enshrined in law. We are not laden with the same assumptions about those not framed in this way, even though mild criminal acts are commonplace within the majority of peoples' everyday lives. Therefore, I felt that my experience of the university ethics procedure further confirmed the validity of pursuing this research project, in order to challenge some of these prevailing consequences of intimate governance practices that situate particular social figures in spaces of abjection, and subsequently enable domicidal policies to be implemented on the basis of moralistic intervention.

Conclusions

This chapter has outlined the methodological processes that lie behind the thesis, exploring the methodologies and research sites chosen, and providing justification for these decisions as being best suited to the aims of the research. I explored the decision-making process behind choosing London as a research site due to the extreme nature of the housing crisis that prevails in the capital. I also outlined the logic behind eventually broadening the research site to incorporate a wider array of inner London boroughs than originally planned due to the transient and spatially precaritised nature of both squatters and social tenants affected by the bedroom tax.

In terms of the research methods themselves, I justified the decision to use semi-structured interviews as the predominant research method, as

they enable 'conversation with a purpose' and help to redress power imbalances between researcher and participant (Burgess 1984, in Mason 2002). I also explored the benefits of semi-structured interviews as part of a multi-stakeholder approach, wherein a wide range of opinions and experiences informed the aims of the research. I also detailed the use of critical discourse analysis as a secondary methodology, which provided a useful framework in enabling me to deconstruct the rhetoric surrounding the figures of the squatter and the social tenant in a manner which proved complimentary to the similar findings that emerged from my conversations with participants.

However, as well as providing a space within which to outline and justify my chosen methodologies, I also wanted this chapter to provide an honest account of the 'messiness' and complexity of the research process (Katz 2013). This chapter critically reflected on the more difficult moments that inevitably arise when bringing a thesis to life. This reflection focused on the deconstruction of my struggle to both resist and understand the 'activist/academic' binary, and to acknowledge the impact of my emotional engagement with my participants and their stories on the analysis, interpretation, and ultimately, politicisation of my research findings.

Finally, I sought to highlight how the very technologies of governance I set out to critique throughout this research manifested itself during the ethical approval procedure. This occurred via the college making particular assumptions around the squatter as an inherently criminal figure; one of the very same figurations I seek to deconstruct throughout the thesis, particularly in the following chapter. I feel that this is a particularly important point, drawing together the discussions around positionality and reflexivity that are present throughout this chapter. Through reflecting on the positionalities not only of myself as a sole researcher, but of the academy itself, I highlight the multiple moments throughout the research process at which we must stop and reflect on

not just on our own positionality, but the positions of all those other actors involved in the production of research.

The following chapter considers the construction of squatters and social tenants in more detail. I do so by first exploring the lineage of home rhetoric in British politics, with a particular focus on the 'neoliberal' turn of the late 1970s onwards. This analysis foregrounds discussion as to the ways in which section 144 and the bedroom tax have been construed in political narrative as just responses to socially immoral behaviours.

Chapter 5

Constructing deviants, enabling domicide: the role of rhetoric in public understandings of squatters and social tenants

At its core, this thesis is an examination of the ways in which section 144 and the bedroom tax dismantle rights to home for low and no-income Londoners. I am primarily concerned with the multifaceted and compounding impacts of the policies, and the ways in which squatters and social tenants seek to resist and reformulate these impacts. However, in order to understand the full extent of the policies and their infringement on the everyday homemaking capacities of squatters and social tenants, it is equally important to trace their rhetorical lineage, particularly in relation to the moralisation of the homespace in political language and rhetoric.

This chapter therefore assesses the ways in which section 144 and the bedroom tax were formulated and legitimised through a socio-political rhetoric that constructs squatters and social tenants as abject citizens. I begin by tracing the relationship between governance practices, citizenship construction and the home in the neoliberal era. In particular, this chapter argues that through the explicit moralisation of tenure type, policies such as section 144 and the bedroom tax are justified through a discourse of fairness. Methodologically, this chapter utilises political speeches, popular media articles, and conversations with research participants to highlight the ways in which understandings of both 'correct' and derided forms of homemaking are normalised in the public psyche. I argue that these moralisations of home enabled section 144 and the bedroom tax to come into being.

Lineages of home in neoliberal political rhetoric

Home and the familial have long been powerful tools in British political rhetoric. The interwar period in particular saw a major shift in rhetorical agendas, with Liberal and Conservative governments alike focusing on a more domesticated political approach (Gilbert and Preston 2003). In the wake of the horrors of the First World War, political rhetoric shied away from traditional glorified, masculinised depictions of the nation as a powerful site of international significance. Although still highly gendered, conceptions of the nation-state focused instead on a more feminised political approach, concentrating on house-building, domestic consumerism and positioning women, the home and family at the epicentre of strong nation-building in the aftermath of war (Light 1991). This continued in the post-World War II context, where large-scale social housebuilding projects formed part of a newly emergent welfare state in the UK established council housing as a predominant tenure. The early to mid-twentieth century therefore saw the beginning of a longstanding and complex relationship between governance, welfare agendas and social tenancy.

Rhetorics of home in British political discourse has a rich and multifaceted history. However, the focus of this thesis lies in the 'neoliberal turn' of the 1980s onwards due to its particular significance in relation to contemporary understandings of welfare provision and conceptualisations of home that are so intrinsic to the introduction of section 144 and the bedroom tax. It is not an overestimation to assert that Margaret Thatcher's premiership (1979-1990) in particular brought about mass social and ideological upheaval in the latter part of the twentieth century. Thatcher's Conservative Party during this period significantly restructured housing policy, firmly connecting housing tenure to citizenship construction and both individual and state morality. This refiguration of housing and home I argue in large part established understandings of social tenants as abject citizens and enabled the

policies of future governments, such as the bedroom tax, to come into being (Tyler 2013; Nowicki 2017b).

The Thatcher administration(s), through both rhetoric and policy, fused neoliberal and socially conservative ideals of citizenship and homemaking. This heralded both the rise of contemporary free market individualist-focused nation-building, whilst at the same time retaining home and the nuclear family as central socio-political values. Depictions of traditional homemaking in particular remained integral to the Conservative moral project. Indeed, in the early years of her leadership, Thatcher was often portrayed in relation to her role as a wife and mother, photographed standing over the kitchen sink doing the dishes in a motherly floral apron. Such imagery explicitly espoused home-as-nation rhetoric, Thatcher's well-maintained home 'a metaphor for the nation'



Figure 1. Margaret Thatcher at home, 1978. Source: *Birmingham Mail*. Accessed online: <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/home-iron-lady---margaret-2572517>

(Gilbert and Preston 2003: 272). Throughout her premiership, Thatcher continually intertwined governance with the familial and homely through a specifically neoliberal lens, an uneasy yet successful social

construction that paired the encouragement of individual property speculation with traditional homely nuclear family values. Thatcher argued that it was only through individuals' responsibility to build strong familial foundations and a home capable of 'balancing the books' that a secure and successful nation could be maintained, and that an over-reliance on the state leads to a lack of citizen commitment to homemaking on both the scale of the household, and of the nation. As she stated in her now well-known interview with *Woman's Own* in 1987; 'most of the [social] problems will be solved within the family structure' (Thatcher 1987). Homemaking, then, was utilised by Thatcher to conduct a moralising and intimate governance agenda, whereby the British people could be instructed on how to perform appropriately as neoliberal citizens through the homespace. Such constructions were specifically class-oriented, encouraging the working-classes to participate in neoliberal frameworks of homemaking that promoted individual responsibility towards the home on the national, as well personal, scale. In particular, Thatcher encouraged homeownership (as opposed in particular to social tenancy) as the key to a successful home life, and thus a successful nation.

Thatcher's most notable and era-defining home-centric policy was the Right to Buy. Introduced in 1980, the Right to Buy³⁹ was a seminal point in the promotion of individualist, anti-welfare rhetoric that has shaped British class politics ever since. The Right to Buy encouraged tenants in social housing to purchase their homes for a fraction of their market value. Inevitably, those with enough capital were able to transition into homeownership, with the poorest tending to remain in social housing. This forever altered the social and cultural landscape of home in Britain, and proves a seminal example in understanding the integral role of both homemaking and home unmaking within governance agendas. The Right to Buy made a particular form of homemaking available to those that

³⁹ Although the right to buy had existed since the early 1970s, it was not until its inclusion in the 1980 Housing Act that the policy became widespread.

could afford it, and simultaneously began to dismantle the homemaking capacities of those who could not, thus establishing a consensus of home unmaking across class lines. The Right to Buy therefore not only decimated the country's social housing stock, it also furthered the politicisation of tenure type (Blandy and Hunter 2013). Where once the inhabitants of housing stock of all tenures had consisted of reasonably mixed social and economic backgrounds, they were now far more homogenous in nature, as many wealthier social tenants 'upscaled' to become homeowners (and later landlords) (Timmins 2001). As the number of homeowners in Britain swelled as a consequence of the Right to Buy, homeownership became more explicitly lauded as the desired tenure type. As Thatcher stated in an interview with *Women's Own*:

One of the reasons why...we want the spread of personal property ever wider, not only because we want the material benefits to spread further wider, but because we believe when you have that personal property you get a much greater feeling of responsibility because you have to exercise responsibility towards it...And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. (Thatcher 1987).

Thatcher's now-infamous 'there is no such thing as society' quote reflects her positioning of the home and individual family units, as opposed to welfare provision, as being at the centre of strong citizenship and nation-building. Here, homeownership is explicitly moralised, both financially in terms of the home as a site through which both personal and national wealth is constructed, and socially as a means of responsible citizenship.

Right to Buy and Thatcher's focus on the home as a central site of governance and citizenship construction therefore established a powerful legacy that intertwined conceptions of the home with equity and the provisions of the free market. At the same time, Thatcher's rhetoric continued to connect with socially conservative constructions of

ethical citizenship and the promotion of traditional forms of homemaking as lying at the epicentre of a strong nation. All governments, Conservative and Labour alike, since Thatcher's have since disseminated a rhetoric that frames homeownership as the aspirational form of tenure, promoting it as beneficial for both the individual and the state (see Flint 2003; Lowe et al 2012; Blandy and Hunter 2013; Hodgkinson and Robbins 2013). For the individual, the primary function of the home has been reframed as a financialised space; a source of equity and financial security, particularly in retirement (Smith 2011). For the state, the privately owned home has become a symbol of economic buoyancy and an important site of moral justification for the rolling back of welfare services. This has occurred hand-in-hand with the increased demonisation of those who cannot or will not aspire to homeownership, in particular social tenants and those that are welfare-dependent more broadly.

As the Thatcher administrations lauded aspirational homeowner and home-as-equity discourses, they simultaneously derided social tenants as unengaged with individualism and wealth creation, the bastions of neoliberal ideology. Right to Buy encouraged binary distinctions between homeowners (or those aspiring to be homeowners) and social tenants, with the latter regarded the antithesis of successful homemaking, and thus successful nation-building (Nowicki 2017a). This established a sense of moral justification for the continued class-oriented home unmaking policies and agendas which were directed at those who remained in social housing, and in particular those who were also welfare dependent in other ways, for example the unemployed. Homemaking rhetoric (specifically in relation to the promotion of homeownership) coupled with the Right to Buy and its potential for producing home unmaking during the Thatcher administrations was therefore central in establishing a moralised rhetoric in relation to both housing tenure and homemaking practices (Nowicki 2017b).

It should at this stage be noted that, although spearheaded by the Conservative prime minister Thatcher, this emergent understanding of the interconnectedness of morality, housing tenure and homemaking has by no means been limited to Conservative housing policies and rhetoric. Tony Blair's New Labour (1997- 2007) in particular continued to understand housing as a moral concern, whereby social tenancy was further developed as symbolic of what a home *should not* be.

In June 1997, the newly elected prime minister Tony Blair gave his inaugural speech at the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark, south London. With the estate⁴⁰ as his backdrop, Blair framed his newly formed government as one dedicated to eradicating moral blight and worklessness in the country, stating:

I have chosen this housing estate to deliver my first speech as prime minister for a very simple reason. For eighteen years, the poorest people in our country have been forgotten by government. They have been left out of growing prosperity, ...There is a case not just in moral terms but in enlightened self-interest to act, to tackle what we all know exists – an underclass of people cut off from society's mainstream, without any sense of shared purpose. Now, at the close of the twentieth century, the decline of old industries and the shift to an economy based on knowledge and skills [have] given rise to a new class: a workless class...a large minority is playing no role in the formal economy, dependent on benefits. (Blair 1997).

⁴⁰ At the time, the Aylesbury Estate in particular had come to symbolise the architectural and moral decay that is now so firmly associated with urban council estates (Lees 2014).



Figure 2. Tony Blair giving his inaugural speech outside the Aylesbury Estate, Southwark, 1997. Photograph by Stefan Rosseau/PA. Source: <https://www.southwarknews.co.uk/news/work-starts-before->

Blair's speech, coupled with the backdrop of the Aylesbury Estate, makes explicit the correlation between social housing, in particular the council estate, and the manifestation of a British 'underclass': a workshy, politically and socially abject group unequipped to contribute to the neoliberal social order (Welshman 2013). The 1980s onwards saw a rise in academic and popular imaginaries of the council estate-dwelling underclass as a growing threat to a new socio-political order that had abandoned the needs of the industry-centred working-classes for a knowledge and service based socio-economic model (see Mann 1992; Welshman 2013). Derived from Marx's derisive discussions of the 'lumpenproletariat' (Marx 1852), the concept of the underclass collectivises 'an entire plethora of disenfranchised people into one stigmatizing category, denoting dangerousness and expendability' (Tyler 2013: 185). As understandings of the underclass as an (anti)social category perpetrated through political and public rhetoric throughout this era, social housing was cultivated as the visual and locational centrepiece for this growing moral panic (Tyler 2013). Blair's reference to social tenants as 'cut off from society's mainstream' encouraged a common understanding that social housing represented the epicentre of society's ills: a breeding ground for the abject and the dangerous.

This constructed relationship between social housing, and specifically the council estate, and moral degeneracy acts as a form of territorial stigmatisation. Territorial stigmatisation is a term introduced by Lois Wacquant to capture the deployment of rhetoric, policy and planning that connects understandings of the poor as morally degenerate to their physical surroundings: that sub-standard living and working conditions are a consequence of abject behaviours, rather than government disinvestment or poor planning (see Wacquant 2007; Slater 2004; 2013; Slater and Anderson 2012). This is constructed in relation to the UK housing system, and perpetuated by events such as Blair's speech at Aylesbury, through ongoing connotations that connect council estates as an architectural form with degenerate social behaviour. As noted in Chapter 3, social housing, despite encompassing a wide range of housing and neighbourhood typologies, is most commonly associated with estates: architectural decay regularly conflated with the supposed moral decay of their residents.

Squats and social housing alike are mired in depictions of slovenly and degenerate living. Squatters and social tenants are depicted as immoral citizens both because of their housing choices: equally their housing choices are seen to further instil socially degenerate behaviours.

Such associations have therefore further justified policies that contribute to home unmaking agendas that focus on the derailment of rights to home for those whose homelives do not fit the homeownership-as-aspiration narrative. Rhetoric and imagery that connects social housing in particular with understandings of a social underclass further justified the unravelling of rights to home for the poor by framing policies that did so as morally necessary and fair. For example, the advent during the 1990s of housing stock transfer from local authorities to housing associations, and the private financing of social housing services through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) further dismantled social tenants' long-term rights to their homes. Assumptions around the private sector as producing higher quality and more cost-effective housing has further justified the erosion of social housing and increased reliance on the private sector to produce housing (Hodkinson 2011; Campkin 2013). This in turn has contributed to a rise in

urban regeneration projects that in large part demolish social housing estates and decant their residents to make way for profit-bearing property owners and private tenants

(Campkin 2013; Lees 2014; Kallin and Slater 2014; Lees and Ferreri 2016). This is understood as a necessary means of improving a neighbourhoods' safety and economic and social appeal: inherent in regeneration practices is an understanding that the urban poor are blockades to successful neighbourhoods due to their inherent relationship with crime and degeneracy (Tyler 2013).

More and more, tenure type has been deployed to stratify, exclude and dismiss particular citizens from the distinctly neoliberal homely imaginings instilled in political rhetoric. The council-flat dwelling, white British workless underclass in particular has developed as a firmly established trope in British popular culture (Haylett 2001). Recent UK documentaries such as *Benefits Street*, *Skint* (Channel 4, 2014 and 2013-15 respectively) and *On Benefits & Proud* (Channel 5, 2013) are high-profile examples of a popularised and ongoing exclusionary process that frames particular, classed British citizens as Other (Crossley and Slater 2014). Such documentaries characterise those who are welfare dependent as 'the bad seeds of the family'; lazy scroungers that threaten to disrupt the security of the homespace from within via a lack of social and economic productivity, and who drain the resources of those that do contribute to the nation. Squatters in contemporary rhetoric are understood through similar, if somewhat more malign, tropes. The popular media, in particular the right-wing tabloid press, regularly portray squatters as hedonistic, dangerous property thieves hell-bent on causing destruction to property (more of this later) (Platt 1999; Middleton 2015).

Such discourse has therefore cemented a socio-political landscape that frames home unmaking agendas as acceptable in relation to those deemed undeserving of their homes. The following section highlights the ways in which the Cameron administration furthered these constructions, enabling the bedroom tax and section 144 to be established as morally just policies.

Home unmaking in the Cameron era

Former Prime Minister David Cameron continued to retain both homemaking and moralised forms of home unmaking as central to his administrations' political rhetoric. Such rhetorics enabled the implementation of stringent housing reforms that in particular penalise the welfare-dependent. Citizens have been encouraged to form homes and households that are in keeping with normative neoliberal ideologies. Married couples have been rewarded with tax breaks, and same-sex marriage was legalised in 2014 by Cameron's government with much political and social aplomb. In the same period, a programme focusing on 'troubled families' associated with welfare dependency, addiction and crime moralised such figures as responsible for a 'Broken Britain'; a reduction in family values framed as a growing national crisis that must be curbed by government intervention (Cameron 2011; Wilkinson 2013; Slater 2016a). As Wilkinson notes, 'despite the supposed increasing acceptance of sexual diversity [for example through the legalisation of same-sex marriage], an exclusionary rhetoric of 'family values' continues to circulate' (2013: 206). This inclusion of (some) LGBTQI relationships into normative familial values such as marriage, versus the implementation of highly exclusionary and divisive policies such as the bedroom tax and programmes that point to 'troubled families' as lying at the centre of the nation's ills, are decisions in large part centred around understandings of what a home *should* be (Brown 2015). Much like his predecessors, and in particular Thatcher, policies and legislative changes relating to housing and the familial were firmly structured around socially conservative understandings of the responsible, self-sustaining nuclear family: married, professional and home-owning (Wilkinson 2013; Brown 2015). Such idealised depictions of the home have in tandem continued to encourage populist understandings of the homelives of low and no-income citizens as sites of degeneracy and limited social participation.

Despite the divisiveness present in his administrations' housing policies, Cameron's rhetoric in relation to the home conversely promoted unity, with the nation depicted as a homespace for all. In his 2014 speech to the Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham, Cameron explicitly placed homemaking at the centre of his aspirations for the country's future within the framework of compassionate, one-nation conservatism, asserting his desire to 'build a Britain that everyone is proud to call home' (Cameron, 2014). Cameron in particular focused on the plight of the poorest in society, declaring;

We are one people in one union and everyone here can be proud of that... And here, today, I want to set out how in this generation we can build a country whose future we can all be proud of...how we can secure a better future for all. How we can build a Britain that everyone is proud to call home. Families come first. They are the way you make a nation strong from the inside out. I care deeply about those who struggle to get by...we are on your side, helping you be all you can. (Cameron 2014, emphasis my own)

Here, Cameron emphasises a desire for a singular, unified homespace, secured through strong familial structures and overseen by a paternalist and compassionate Conservative government. In the speech, Cameron places particular emphasis on unity, belonging ('we are one people') and social security ('we can secure a better future for all'), evoking well-established (if grossly over-simplified) affectations of home as 'ours', a sacrosanct site of safety and security to be prioritised and protected. Cameron also focuses on the familial as an integral means of state construction; the foundation of 'a nation strong from the inside out'. Cameron's political rhetoric is clearly founded in homemaking discourse, constructing a sense of unified nation-building and explicitly framing the home and family as the key to a prosperous and secure state. This is exemplified by Cameron's incorporation of homely imagery during his 2015 general election campaign, whereby he conducted an intimate interview with the BBC from the kitchen of his Cotswolds home (BBC 2015). The interview depicts Cameron as an 'average family man'

character, cheering his son on at a football match on the village common, and preparing a meal in his rustic country kitchen (very much mirroring the homely representations of his predecessor Thatcher discussed earlier). Here, Cameron explicitly brings the intimacies of home life to the fore of political rhetoric, his interview implicitly assuring his potential electorate that his continued leadership would be one centred on traditional values of homemaking.



Figure 3: David Cameron at home in his kitchen, 2007, Photograph by Simon Roberts. Source: <http://www.katherinebrickell.com/2012/06/13/on-not-leaving-your-daughter-in-the-pub-public-fatherhood-and-kitchen-politics-cameron-style/>

Alongside his cosy espousals of homeliness, Cameron's rhetoric has also continued along a by-now well-established trajectory that attributes social tenancy and worklessness to moral decay. His compassionate, homely one-nation speeches concurrently, and contradictorily, include decidedly othering language that seeks to reinforce the moralisation of home unmaking along classed lines. Interlaced throughout many of Cameron's calls for compassion, social unity, and constructions of the nation-as-home are numerous references that allude specifically to supporting those who 'want to get on and *work hard* in life' (Cameron 2015b, emphasis my own); those 'who do the right thing, *put the effort in*, *who work* and build communities' (Cameron, 2014, emphasis my

own); and promises 'to back *working* people', implicitly condemning citizens who are unemployed, regardless of their circumstances (Cameron 2015a, emphasis my own). Therefore, within the homely imagery of compassionate governance that seeks to maintain and protect a national homespace for all, the workless other is simultaneously framed as unwilling to participate, a deviant figure who chooses not to contribute to national homemaking agendas, and thus framed as undeserving of rights to home. Such othering again re-establishes conceptions of those who are welfare-reliant as socially immoral. This in turn reinforces justification for the implementation of home unmaking policies such as the bedroom tax that fixate on the penalisation of those living in social housing in particular.

This process of homely and familial rhetoric emphasises unification whilst simultaneously excluding particular citizens and dismantling their homemaking capacities. This again highlights the complex, and at times contradictory, relationship between rhetorics of home and the realities of housing policy. Cameron's avowal that he aimed to create 'a Britain *everyone* is proud to call home', alongside his consistent references to one-nationism and the unity of British citizens, stands in stark contrast to the realities of many of the policies implemented under his premiership (Nowicki 2017b). On the one hand, Cameron earnestly promised to support the most vulnerable and ensure a morally just society that protects all those who want to 'get on in life'. On the other, his government(s) introduced a suite of policy reforms that have fundamentally destabilised the homemaking capacities of hundreds of thousands of Britain's most economically and socially vulnerable citizens, most notably through the controversial Welfare Reform Act (2012) and the criminalisation of squatting in a residential building.

2012: The year of stigma

As this chapter has highlighted, section 144 and the bedroom tax emerged at a time when perceptions of the poor had experienced fundamental shifts as a consequence of neoliberal ideologies coming to the fore as the normative social and political framework in the UK. The rise of homeownership as the lauded form of tenure, and the subsequent disparagement of all other forms of homemaking, established an understanding of citizens such as squatters and social tenants as deviant, morally questionable figures. Prior to the implementation of section 144 and the bedroom tax, squatters and social tenants were already precariously positioned: their collective autonomy fragmented by the rise in neoliberal individualism and a reduction in popular support for welfare and alternative modes of living. And yet, until 2012, squatting remained technically legal, and policies such as the Right to Buy had fallen in popularity, with Tony Blair's first administration reducing the discount available to tenants who wished to buy their homes from £50,000 to £38,000 (Wilson 1999). Why, then, did 2012 provide the setting for such a large scale resurgence in both rhetoric and policymaking that demonised those who do not, or cannot, aspire to be homeowners? The following section considers the specific socio-political conditions present in the years and months immediate to the introduction of section 144 and the bedroom tax that enabled the policies to come into being at this particular moment in time.

The bedroom tax and austerity rhetoric

The election of a Conservative-led government in 2010 was of course a large factor in the introduction of the bedroom tax, enabling an explicit return to a form of neoliberal politics akin to the Thatcher era. However, it must be noted that the Conservatives had failed to win a majority in

the 2010 election, and their subsequent coalition with the Liberal Democrats may have in differing national and global financial circumstances potentially diluted extensive cuts to welfare.

I therefore argue that it would be unlikely that the bedroom tax would have been implemented without the global financial crisis of 2007 and the austerity politics that emerged in its aftermath. The Labour Party were largely seen to have lost the 2010 general election on the basis that they had been responsible for the recession; it was therefore on the basis of returning to a Thatcherite language of 'balancing the books' and reducing the nation's deficit that the Conservative Party were able to return to power, albeit with warnings that in order to right the financial wrongs committed by Labour, economic austerity would inevitably have to be implemented until the economy improved. In a 2009 speech prior to his election as Prime Minister, Cameron referred to a future Conservative government providing;

...A whole new, never-been-done-before approach to the way this country is run. Why? Because the world has completely changed. In this new world comes the reckoning for Labour's economic incompetence. The age of irresponsibility is giving way to the age of austerity (Cameron 2009, emphasis my own).

The financial crisis was ideologically reworked by the Conservative Party and other right-wing institutions from an issue of global economics, to one of national (i.e. Labour) overspend on welfare facilitated by wider economic recession (Clarke and Newman 2012; Bramall 2013). The 'age of austerity' pronounced by Cameron in 2009 framed the recession as a consequence of 'the unwieldy and expensive welfare state and public sector, rather than the high risk strategies of banks, as the root cause of the crisis' (Clarke and Newman 2012: 300).

Financial recession therefore enabled Cameron's administration to present those in receipt of welfare as both part of the root cause of the

crisis, and a threat to future financial stability through their continuing negative effects on the morally upstanding, property-owning, individualised citizen. This was in large part achieved by framing welfare expenditure as an unnecessary burden on the taxpayer (Slater 2016a). Clarke and Newman attribute this to what they term 'magical thinking'; the idea that if something is asserted in the public sphere often enough, it will take on a sense of 'truth' (Clarke and Newman 2012). As Slater notes, 'The Tories in Britain have transformed the 2007-2008 crisis of capitalism into a crisis of the welfare state' (2016: 26). Such depictions of the financial crisis being caused by a bloated welfare state and 'soft' legal system (re)enabled a set of logics that re-asserted and extended neoliberalism as foundational to British politics (Hodkinson and Robbins 2013). This re-commitment to the neoliberal cause therefore aided in the construction of the bedroom tax as a necessary, pragmatic and morally just solution to recession. Cameron's 2009 speech heavily inferred that austerity measures were a necessary and innovative response (a 'never-been-done-before approach') to the irresponsible over-borrowing of the previous Labour governments.

This points to what Slater has termed 'the production of ignorance', whereby the encouragement of ignorance and the deployment of misinformation acts as a powerful tool of governance (Slater 2012). Drawing on the work of Robert Proctor, Slater argues that ignorance production is a calculated political strategy, a classic example of divide and rule governance, whereby already marginalised groups are further stigmatised through the spread of misinformation that frames them as responsible for society's ills (Proctor 2008; Slater 2012; 2016). Referring to the 2007-2008 financial crash, Davies and McGoeey note that: 'ignorance, not knowledge, has often been the most indispensable resource throughout the crisis' (2012: 65). In the context of Cameron's governments' emphasis on welfare reform, culpability for the global economic crash was deflected away from global banking structures and subprime lending, and refashioned into a simplistic account of welfare overspend occurring as a consequence of workshy scroungers (Slater

2012). Austerity was consequently framed both as a necessary means of national economic recovery, and as a morally sound strategy, as its impact would be directed towards those who had, in the popular rhetoric espoused by Cameron and his government, caused financial instability in the first place.

Austerity rhetoric therefore constructs social and economic precarity as inevitable. Austerity is understood as the only process by which to reduce state spending on welfare, and thus stabilise the economy. This normalisation of austerity in turn justifies the instalment of further precarity into the lives of social tenants, framed as an act of stabilising both the nation's economy and social morality. By reinstating 'fairness' into the welfare system and purportedly protecting citizens such as homeowners who are deemed morally and economically dependable, austerity, and thus precarity, is subsumed into the everyday post-recession landscape. Austerity, then, repackages the precarisation of social tenants as both a necessary and moral framework for establishing a fairer society.

A self-fulfilling prophecy? Rhetorically criminalising squatters

As discussed in Chapter 2, perceptions of squatting since the mid-twentieth century developed predominately around characterisations of the squatter as criminal and threatening to the law-abiding, property-owning citizen (Platt 1999; Vasudevan 2017). Legislative changes began to adapt accordingly to such characterisations, in particular via the 1977 Criminal Law Act and the 2002 Land Registration Act (Cobb and Fox 2007). This combination of social and legal figuration worked to establish the squatter as a socially deviant character. Criminalisation appeared to be a likely outcome for many years during the latter half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Indeed, the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act criminalised 'disruptive trespass', a piece of

legislation often attributed as an attempt to further curtail squatting (Reeve 2015). In light of such robustly negative perceptions and legal steps towards criminalisation, it appeared to be only a matter of time, and the emergence of enough political impetus, before the threat of criminalisation became a reality.

Although a controversial practice for many decades, squatting as a concept became more and more toxic in the run up to its partial criminalisation. This was in spite of the fact that even prior to criminalisation, people's ability to squat had already long been hindered by legislation. It was widely agreed among squatters that I spoke with that the 1977 and 2002 legislation provided sufficient protection for property owners, and that squatting had certainly not been an easy lifestyle choice prior to section 144 (although it was undoubtedly made more difficult once criminalisation had been implemented). One participant, Charlie, who I met several times during the autumn of 2014, had until recently squatted for many years (a combination of section 144 and a demanding job had led to his decision to stop). He commented that;

*The law pre-section 144 had been sufficient in protecting both squatters and property owners. There's no need for section 144. It just seems to fit in with this ongoing narrative of squatters as people who sneak into your house when you're on holiday and won't leave!*⁴¹

Charlie did not understand why criminalisation had, seemingly suddenly, been introduced by the Coalition when there had been plenty of existing legislation that meant squatting could not be realistically utilised as a means of property theft.

When I asked squatter participants why they thought section 144 had been introduced at that particular time, many struggled to provide an

⁴¹ Face-to-face interview, 15/10/2014.

answer. Like Charlie, many participants seemed confused by the timing of the legislation when the practice had been derided, and yet remained legal, for so long. However, for some, there was a clear relationship between ongoing negative rhetoric surrounding squatting and its eventual criminalisation. Tariq, a squatter living in a former pub in Southwark, believed that section 144 had come into being in 2012 because ‘there was a high volume of “evil squatter” stories at the time’⁴². He thought that this in part had enabled section 144 to be added as a last-minute amendment to the 2012 Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act with very little public resistance. Particularly vehement stories regarding the hedonistic and selfish activities of squatters therefore arguably legitimised the desires of those who oppose squatting to see it further curtailed through law: an opportunistic moment of intimate governance, whereby constructions of squatting as an immoral and degenerate practice became further consolidated.

One story in particular was brought up several times in conversations I had with squatters that encapsulated perceptions of squatters as dangerous, abject and criminal in the run-up to the criminalisation of squatting. In 2011, the year before section 144 was introduced, a large group of squatters (ranging from eleven to fourteen people according to various news reports) broke into and squatted a house in West Hampstead, north-west London. The house had recently been bought by a doctor and his heavily pregnant wife, who had been due to move in shortly before the birth of their child. After occupying the house for nearly two weeks, a court order was eventually issued against the squatters and the group disbanded. The media depiction of the incident made much of the fact that the Cockerells, the couple who owned the house, were professionals (Dr Cockerell defined by his position as a Harley Street consultant) and that his wife was pregnant (nearly all of the articles I found relating to the incident had ‘pregnant’ in their headline). The squatters, on the other hand, were depicted as ‘spongers’

⁴² Face to face interview, 16/07/2015

(Daily Mail 2011a; 2011b) and derided for refusing an offer made by Dr Cockerell to pay them £500 if they left the property immediately. As the Daily Mail reported:

The Harley Street neurologist, whose Somali-born 35-year old wife is due to give birth today, said they had spent 'thousands' to evict the squatters. In a bid to get their home back, they even offered them £500 to move out. The gang demanded more (Daily Mail 2011a, emphasis my own).

By placing emphasis on both Dr Cockerell's status as a successful professional, and Mrs Cockerell's pregnancy, the couple were framed as idealised functioning and (re)productive citizens working hard and buying a home to raise their future family in. In particular, the emphasis on Mrs Cockerell's pregnancy implicitly inspired a further sense of outrage from the reader. Not only were the group stripping homeowners of the supposed security of property-ownership, they were denying a soon-to-be mother her home. This plays upon longstanding gendered conceptions of the home as the realm of mothers and their children (Blunt and Dowling 2006). The depiction of a group of young people (mainly men) taking that away further creates a sense of the violation of a young family whose home has been torn away from them by a guileful gang of squatters.

The squatters were described as a gang demanding money that they have not earned from a hard-working professional couple. This is in some ways very much akin to depictions of the underclass discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to social tenants: an abject, workshy group scrounging off the hardworking taxpayer. However, this depiction of the squatter crew in question is particularly malign. Unlike the lazy scrounger trope so often applied to social tenants, squatters are often depicted using language that pertains to active criminality, rather than passive worklessness. The use of the word 'gang' in this news story

denotes danger and lawlessness, whilst 'demanded' implies the expectation of being awarded something not earned. Even when reporters acknowledged that on hearing that they were squatting the home of a heavily pregnant woman, the group apologised to the couple, and cleaned the house before leaving, traditional depictions of squatters as property destroyers continued to be included wherever possible. For example, in a report by the *Evening Standard*, after describing how the squatters had vowed to clean the house, and could be heard vacuuming before leaving, the reporter concluded with the following comment:

The squatters left a crushed beer can in the living room of the unfurnished Edwardian house (Evening Standard 2011)

The focus on the crushed beer can is emblematic of the ongoing construction of the squatter as hedonistic and irresponsible, the antithesis of the property-owning, respectable socially functioning citizen (Platt 1999). The image of the distorted beer can on the floor of an Edwardian Hampstead home personifies hegemonic constructions of the underclass as not belonging, as defacing societal ideals with selfish and lazy behaviours.

With such unsympathetic depictions having evolved to become part of a standardised public perception of squatters, the scene was set for the implementation of criminalisation. The anti-squatting agenda in the run up to the introduction of section 144 was led most fervently by the former Conservative MP for Hove and Portslade Mike Weatherley, who had for many years been campaigning for the criminalisation of squatting, and in 2011 put forward an early day motion to the House of Commons calling for its criminalisation (Weatherley 2011a).

In the same year he gave an impassioned speech effectively damning squatters as cartoonish societal villains intent on causing as much social and financial trouble as possible:

I wish to dispel the myth once and for all that squatters and homeless people are one and the same...In my experience, squatters do not fit the profile of the kind of vulnerable people that we should be looking out for... They run rings around the law. And what these professional squatters lack in respect for other people's property, they make up for in guile and tenacity. They are organised and frequently menacing. (Weatherley, 2011b).

By dismissing any link between squatting and vulnerability as 'myth', and portraying squatters as guileful, hedonistic property thieves, Weatherley's campaign inverted perceptions of vulnerability, casting the victim as the property owner whose home is under threat, and detaching squatting as a practice from the need for home and shelter. Weatherley encouraged the implementation of the law as a means of protecting the hard-working homeowner from such deviant figures. Weatherley's reference to squatters' 'guile and tenacity' and their organisational skills in particular sought to frame understandings of squatters as not only criminals, but as particularly dangerous ones in light of their well-planned enactments of home-theft on the unsuspecting homeowner. This again highlights the more malign way in which squatters are constructed in political and media rhetoric compared to social tenants, encouraging understandings of squatters as inherently criminal in order to frame section 144 as a morally just act.

In the latter stages of my research, I made several attempts to get in touch with Mike Weatherley in order to discuss the reasons for his staunch support for section 144. I wanted to understand why he was so against the practice of squatting, and hoped to gain some insight not possible from speaking to people who tended to be sympathetic towards squatters. Having spent more than a year speaking with squatters, visiting squats and attending related protests and rallies, I felt that it would be beneficial to hear the perspectives of proponents of section 144, in order to hear both sides of the story. However, these attempts were to no avail. In 2015, Weatherley stepped down from Parliament due

to health reasons, making it particularly difficult to get in touch (Prince 2015). Although I subsequently made contact with the Hove and Portslade Conservative Party office in an attempt to track down contact details for Weatherley, I was ultimately never provided with them (despite several attempts via telephone and email). When it became clear that I was not going to be able to speak with Weatherley, I decided instead to contact Mike Freer, the Conservative MP for Finchley and Golders Green, who was also a strong supporter of the criminalisation of squatting, and had been one of the signatories of Weatherley's early day motion (Weatherley 2011a). After sending several emails to his constituency office requesting a meeting or telephone conversation regarding his support for section 144, I was eventually met with the following response:

Dear Ms Nowicki

Thank you for your email. I regret that I am not able to meet. I can say that since the change in the law I have not been aware of a single case of residential squatting in my constituency. Previously I'd had several cases. In addition statistics from the courts also suggests that the incidences of residential squatting have stopped. I understand the stats showing how many people have been to court to repossess their homes has plummeted.

Sincerely

Mike Freer MP⁴³

Freer's dismissal of my request for a meeting, and his brief response to my questions made it somewhat difficult to gain any real insight as to why the criminalisation of squatting had been such an important issue for him. The highly limited response from both Weatherley and Freer

⁴³ Email response, 11/10/2016.

therefore greatly inhibited the potential for engaging with proponents of section 144.

I did however eventually manage to speak with another public proponent of section 144, the (Labour) leader of Lambeth council, Lib Peck. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Peck, along with Chuka Umuna and Tessa Jowell, high-profile Labour MPs with constituencies in Lambeth, had in 2013 written an open letter to then-Justice Secretary Chris Grayling that commended the criminalisation of squatting in a residential building, stating that it had 'brought a welcome relief to homeowners in Lambeth' (Peck et al 2013). The letter however also criticised the legislation for not going far enough, calling for the criminalisation of squatting to be extended to commercial, as well as residential, buildings. The letter referred to two incidents of squatting in the borough that had involved violent behaviour, with allegations of rape and sexual assault on the part of the squatters:

There was one allegation of rape, a series of violent assaults and an attempted suicide during the eight-week duration of the squat. Costs to the developers are estimated to be £100k plus. The impact on the local community was devastating, with the local councillor referring to it as 'the worst case of squatting in 19 years on the council'. (Peck et al 2013)

The letter was heavily implicit in its linking of violent and abhorrent behaviour to the practice of squatting: that the two are intrinsically connected to one another. Similarly to the story of the Cockerills' experience, squatters here are constructed as violent and destructive, as rapists and attackers. This is in direct contrast to home and community, understood as sites of (re)productivity and security. This returns to earlier arguments made in this chapter that underscored the ways in which citizens are constructed as deviant through their housing choices and conditions.

I was interested to speak with Councillor Peck, in order to better understand the extent of her anti-squatting position, and whether her commitment to its further criminalisation remained as extensive as it had been in 2013. During a phone conversation in November 2016⁴⁴, I asked Peck why she stood against squatting and supported section 144's extension. She responded that there is a 'fairness argument' against squatting: that in an acute housing shortage, both residential and commercial properties could be used more wisely than as spaces for squatters. She also cited a negative impact on the borough's aesthetics, and squatting leading to anti-social behaviour⁴⁵ as reasons for her position. Unlike in her 2013 letter, Peck was reticent to firmly denounce squatting, moving the conversation to a wider discussion around limited social housing, and that squatting would not be an issue if more affordable homes were being built in London, and a more 'responsible' private rented sector were encouraged (issues that she assured me she was a committed advocate and campaigner of). Once again, Peck explicitly connected squatting to anti-social behaviour, suggesting that the two are intrinsically bound to one another. This reflects her comments in her 2013 letter to Grayling, whereby violence and assault were cited as reasons for squatting's criminalisation. These simplified assumptions of squatters, like the workshy scrounger trope so often attributed to social tenants, once again connect behaviour to tenure type and housing choices, in a narrative that derides all those who do not, or cannot, aspire to be homeowners. Ultimately, the suggestion is that if you are not a homeowner (or aspiring homeowner) then you are an abject citizen incapable of positively contributing to society (Tyler 2013).

⁴⁴ Telephone interview, 21/11/2016.

⁴⁵ Councillor Peck had promised to send me concrete examples of anti-social behaviour by squatters. However, after months of attempting to follow this up with her assistant, the examples were never sent to me.

Peck's assertion that the criminalisation of squatting is 'an issue of fairness' in the context of the housing crisis also relates back to Coalition rhetoric regarding the bedroom tax: both suggest that the policies exist in order to promote economic, and moral, fairness. Both Peck's assertion that squatted buildings could be put to better use, and Cameron's justification that the bedroom tax better aligns social tenure with private rental conditions, supposedly amounting to a fairer housing system, are explicit in their understanding of squatters and social tenants as wasting valuable space at the expense of the hardworking taxpayer. Such rhetoric therefore justifies section 144 and the bedroom tax as fair policies on the basis that they are protecting those who contribute the most to society (the taxpaying homeowner).

Clearly, then rhetorics of home are integral in establishing the socio-political conditions whereby policies such as section 144 and the bedroom tax can be implemented with minimised resistance. Rhetorics of home are vital in both the construction of ideal citizenship, and the dismissal and stigmatisation of the poor as morally unsound. This chapter demonstrated how housing tenure has been utilised as the benchmark by which to laud or deride citizens according to their position (or lack of) in the housing market. I argue that it is in large part on the strength of such rhetoric that section 144 and the bedroom tax were able to be introduced by the Coalition government as fair and pragmatic responses to wider crises brought about by an unwieldy welfare state and a need for the further protection of homeowners.

The following two chapters examine the impact of these policies on squatters and social tenants. I focus on the multifaceted ways in which both section 144 and the bedroom tax negatively impact the lives of squatters and social tenants affected, compounding precarity into every aspect of their everyday lives and severely reducing their sense of autonomy over their homes.

Chapter 6

Compounding domicile, compounding precarity: the impact of section 144

This thesis has thus far outlined and examined the ways in which section 144 and the bedroom tax are in large part a consequence of longstanding and ever-evolving constructions of low-income citizens as socially deviant. The Coalition government's decision to implement these policies connect to a lineage of socio-political interpretations of home that frame those unable or unwilling to enact idealised performances of citizenship and homemaking as socially parasitical, and therefore undeserving of home. Whilst such context is fundamental in understanding how section 144 and the bedroom tax came into being, it is equally integral to interrogate the everyday lived impacts of the policies in order to fully understand their function in London's contemporary housing landscape.

The following two chapters provide an account of the multifaceted ways in which section 144 and the bedroom tax infiltrate and unravel the home-making capacities of squatters and social tenants. The multiplicity of their impact is a key site of interrogation when considering the ways in which the policies have reconfigured the life worlds of squatters and social tenants. Several factors layer and compound to produce a precarisation of the homespace that infiltrates through multiple scales. This multi-layered compounding of precarity has recently been termed 'hyper-precarity' by Hannah Lewis and colleagues (Lewis et al 2015). Lewis et al's discussion of hyper-precarity focuses on the multivalent ways in which migrants moving to the Global North see every aspect of their life precaritised. Through the framework of hyper-precarity, Lewis et al extend existing conceptualisations of workplace precarity and the plight of the precariat through highlighting the multifaceted forms of precarity that are instigated through spatio-temporal specificities, such as border regimes and trafficking related debt. These multiple

precarities compound to the point of complete entrapment, an embodiment of hyper-precarity, whereby every aspect of migrant workers' (in the context of Lewis et al's work) lives and movements are embedded within multiple states of precarity that they are unable to break away from (Lewis et al 2015).

Section 144 and the bedroom tax function in a similar manner, with the home acting as a key site through which precarity is induced at various spatio-temporal points, reacting with and compounding through existing socio-political factors (for example, contemporary framings of property as equity, and demonised figurations of squatters and social tenants, issues discussed in the previous chapter). The following two chapters highlight the ways in which hyper-precarity is felt by squatters and social tenants through the following mediums:

- Forced eviction (or the threat of). In particular, it's shift from an acute event to a process that imbues itself within the everyday for squatters and social tenants affected by the bedroom tax.
- The disproportionate impact of both section 144 and the bedroom tax on those already living with physical and mental health conditions, and the increased vulnerability of women who squat in the wake of the law change.
- The commercialised reappropriation of precarious living and welfare dependency, through guardianship schemes in the case of section 144, and Help to Buy and shared ownership schemes in the case of the bedroom tax.
- The policies' further entrenchment of understandings of the city's poorest as socially parasitical, thus justifying the destruction of their homes, which I term 'socio-symbolic domicile'.

This hyper-precaritisation through the homespace therefore inflicts a mode of everyday domicile that impacts upon the lives of squatters and social tenants in multiple and varying ways. Using the four key elements outlined above as a framework, the following chapters will explore the

impacts of the two policies on the lives of squatters and social tenants, beginning in this chapter with an account of the impacts of section 144.

Forced eviction

Section 144, as a change in law that ensures the physical removal (and potential fining and imprisonment) of squatters, is clearly aligned within the typology of domicide in a multitude of ways. At its most literal, section 144 has brought about domicide through the increased forced eviction (and threat of) of squatters.

Squatting has never been a particularly stable or long-term practice, and has been under continual political and legal attack, particularly since the mid-twentieth century (Platt 1999; Reeve 2015). It is a practice that is in many ways at odds with idealised conceptions of the home as a site of stability, of security: the ‘home as hearth’ (Relph 1976). And yet, squatting was a fundamental, although much overlooked, factor in the provision of secure, state-managed post-war housing. As outlined in Chapter 2, the inadequacy of the post-World War II government’s housing strategy for veterans and their families, and rising homelessness set the stage for the rise of people choosing to squat empty buildings as not only a pragmatic solution to housing shortages, but as a cry of resistance and a demand for secure, state-run housing (Vasudevan 2017). The squatting movements of the 1960s and 1970s continued to forge a relationship between the occupation of empty properties and a demand for secure social housing in the capital. The London Squatter’s Campaign, founded in 1968, targeted empty council housing as a means of highlighting the socially unjust practice of local authorities leaving council accommodation to rot in order to make way for demolition and redevelopment schemes⁴⁶ (Bailey 1973). The press and public opinion at

⁴⁶ A process all too familiar in contemporary regeneration schemes in the capital.

the time were generally sympathetic towards the plight of squatters. This empathetic public climate in part contributed to the formation of licensing agreements with squatters, which focused on establishing the legal short-term use of empty properties for homeless families (Vasudevan 2017). Whilst public support for squatting dwindled in the 1970s and 80s due in large part to the reframing of squatters as young, hedonistic troublemakers (Platt 1999), as discussed in Chapter 5, longer-term squats continued to form part of London's subcultural and sublegal housing landscape up until the implementation of section 144.

Therefore, whilst squatting has always been contentious, inevitably and intrinsically linked to state-led forced eviction practices, prior to section 144 squatters had nonetheless at times possessed some negotiating power, particularly in terms of their ability to remain in properties for relatively long time periods. And although it is commonly associated with short-termism and the political occupation of run-down buildings, the ability of squatters to forge homemaking alternatives (particularly for those on low-incomes), both through squatting's longstanding championing of social housing, and through its ability within itself to provide shelter for vulnerable people, means that its retraction via section 144 has derailed an important form of homemaking, as well as a method of political protest.

Long-term squats have become somewhat obsolete in the post-section 144 landscape, with forced eviction a constant reality for squatters in London. The vast majority of squatters I met throughout the course of my research were under continual threat of forced eviction, whether they were in residential or commercial properties. When I met Rhys in early 2015, he told me that he had recently given up on squatting entirely as section 144 had made it too difficult to sustain the practice. He told me that since the law's implementation, he and his crew had avoided squatting residential properties, instead occupying empty commercial buildings (now a common practice among London's squatting community). However, these properties were also difficult to maintain

for any period of time, with local authorities and property owners swiftly issuing eviction notices. He had lived in four or five squats over the course of a few months, with the average time in each being just a few weeks. Unsurprisingly, after this spate of forced evictions he commented that, *'I gave up in the end, it was just too hard'*⁴⁷. Rhys relocated to Cambridge to live with friends, his inability to establish any form of housing security in London driving him out of the increasingly expensive capital. Experiencing forced eviction on such a regular basis made it impossible for Rhys to forge any long-term connection with the city, with every opportunity to occupy a property and construct a homespace quickly disbanded by increasingly tough responses to squatting, both residential and commercial. For Rhys and his crewmates, forced eviction was not an acute moment of housing precarity, but a constant incursion into their everyday lives (Brickell 2014; Brickell et al 2017). Forced eviction, then, is an intrinsic tool in the destruction of squatting as a home-making practice.

Rhys' story was not an uncommon one during the course of my research, with several participants recounting being forcibly evicted from their squats with alarming regularity. Dave, for example, told me that he and his crew had been evicted from five buildings in the space of a month. Whilst Dave and some of his crewmates eventually found a longer-term squat⁴⁸, the constant fear of eviction and the practicalities of finding enough buildings appropriate to squat in such a short space of time had inevitably led to some of his friends abandoning the practice entirely.

This process of repeated forced eviction is an enactment of everyday intimate violence that vastly decreases squatters' ability to secure a homespace. Indeed, this is a destruction of home that occurs before the home itself has truly been established, squats often being evicted within a matter of days of being first settled. At a conference on the future of squatting that I attended in the autumn of 2014, a volunteer at the

⁴⁷Face-to-face interview, 16/02 2015.

⁴⁸ This squat is one of the foci of Chapter 8.

Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS), a service that provides advice and legal support for squatters, commented to me that the advice line phone he and other volunteers man in their east London offices had been ‘*deafeningly silent*’ since the introduction of section 144. He told me that people were becoming too afraid of the prospect of imprisonment and heavy fines to continue squatting in residential buildings.

Clearly, then, forced eviction practices have had a steadfastly negative impact on the ability of squatters to both secure and maintain a homespace in London. And yet, one squat has to date remained a steadfast anomaly. On the edge of the city, a large squat has sat on disused land close to Heathrow Airport since 2010, an extremely long time in the context of contemporary squatting. As section 144 has decimated the practice of squatting throughout the city, Grow Heathrow has remained, to date surviving numerous court battles and eviction attempts, and celebrating its seventh birthday in March 2017. Set up in 2010 by the climate change activist group Transition Heathrow, Grow Heathrow was established on an abandoned market garden site in the village of Sipson, one of the residential areas under threat of demolition to make way for Heathrow’s third runway. The group claimed to have cleared 30 tonnes of rubbish from the site when they first arrived. Prior to the establishment of Grow Heathrow, the site had become infamous in the village for drinking and drug-use, attacks on young people, and other anti-social behaviour. Lily, a resident of Grow Heathrow, and my unofficial tour guide during my visit to the site, informed me that Grow Heathrow had been built on ‘transition town’ principles:

It’s about coming together as local communities to address climate change, about building a positive alternative and resisting Heathrow runway expansion. And a more radical use of space.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Face-to-face interview, 14/07/2015



Figure 4: Grow Heathrow's seventh birthday party poster. Source: *Transition Heathrow Blog Archive*: <http://www.transitionheathrow.com/2017/02/grow-heathrows-7th-birthday-saturday-4th-march-more-details-coming-soon/>

I arrived for my visit on a beautiful July afternoon to a site buzzing with people, some residents of the squat, others staying for a short period, others visiting for the day. Lily, a relative newcomer to Grow Heathrow, proceeded to show me around. Every structure and building had been constructed by the squatters, from the allotments that grow the vast majority of the food eaten by residents and visitors (this is accompanied by regular 'skipping' excursions - taking unused food from supermarket bins), to the communal and living areas. Buildings tended to be made from wood and

corrugated iron, but Lily was particularly keen to show me a building in a peaceful corner of the site made almost entirely of straw bale (along with sand and horse manure). She explained that this was her favourite place in Grow Heathrow, and that she and other residents often used this building to rest, write, and get away from the often hectic nature of communal living.

She then took me to the communal living areas to show me around and introduce me to other residents. A handmade, somewhat ramshackle greenhouse led to the Grow Heathrow kitchen, an open plan wooden building decorated with an array of mismatching rugs, armchairs and cabinets. This, in opposition to the straw bale house, appeared very much to be the centre of activity, with a constant throng of people wandering

in and out, cooking, playing guitars in the corner, or relaxing with a beer out in the greenhouse.

Despite its unconventional setting and 'make-do' aesthetic, Grow Heathrow in many ways encompasses traditional conceptions of the 'homely' home (Blunt and Dowling 2006). In his 1988 work *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, the urbanist and architect Witold Rybczynski outlined the importance of comfort in the establishment of the modern home. Whilst Rybczynski's conceptualisation of the home was undoubtedly romanticised and uncritical of the relationship between home, housing and family, it nonetheless highlighted the importance of comfort as a practice of home-making: of transforming a dwelling into a home (Rybczynski 1988). It was evident that the residents of Grow Heathrow, too, sought comfort, both material and imaginative, in their home. Soft furnishings, and low lighting in the kitchen/living room area, and private rooms and buildings for sleeping and spending time alone produced a somewhat surprising sense of conformity to idealisations of home in an anything but conformist setting. Decorations for the communal areas had been added over the years by residents past and present, and newer buildings, such as the straw bale house, added to accommodate for the expanding Grow Heathrow family. The pride Lily exhibited when showing me the creative ways in which the collective had developed the site brought to mind the traditional adage 'an Englishman's home is his castle'. In spite of the precarity of life in a squat, a long-term home had been lovingly built, personalised and expanded. For Lily and the other residents, some of whom had lived on the site since its establishment in 2010, Grow Heathrow represents not only a desire for autonomy and environmentally sustainable living, but a site of comfort, and of identity expression through material culture, perhaps some of the most fundamental traditional constructions of a home (Miller 2001).



Figure 5: The Grow Heathrow kitchen. Photography by Peter Nicholls/Reuters. Source: <http://avax.news/pictures/189690>

Grow Heathrow disrupts social, cultural and political conceptualisations of the modern squat as a site of immorality, hedonism and disregard for property ownership. Rather, the site clearly connects the practice of squatting to that of homemaking and wider community. As Lily comments, *'it's changed people's ideas of what a squatter is, especially in the local area'*. Lily and the other long-term residents of Grow Heathrow that I spoke with prided themselves on their positive relationship with the locals living in Sipson and nearby. Grow Heathrow holds regular open days, events and workshops at the site, which locals regularly attend. Grow Heathrow, although originally established as a political response to Heathrow's proposed third runway has over the past seven and a half years extended beyond its original purpose as a site of protest. It is now a bona fide part of the local community, and a place to call home for many. Grow Heathrow therefore demonstrates that squats, although certainly sites of subcultural and politically-motivated lifestyles, are also in some ways very much imbued with many of the same imaginaries and understandings of the traditional British home. This highlights that squatting is not solely about making political statements through the

occupation of property or land, nor is it solely the means to construct alternative subcultural and anarchistic lifestyles. It is a practice for which homemaking and community-building is a central component.

However, despite its relative longevity compared to other squats that I visited, Grow Heathrow was certainly not immune from threats of forced eviction and, more broadly, the dismantling of squatting as a homemaking practice. Grow Heathrow has been under threat of eviction more or less since its founding in 2010. Those living on the site have faced numerous court hearings, including the High Court and the Court of Appeal that have ruled that they should leave the site (BBC 2013). On several occasions the group have had to prepare for the rumoured arrival of bailiffs. When I was visiting in summer 2015, one of the residents recounted to me a recent incident where they had been warned that the owner of the land had hired bailiffs to remove them from the property. The group had prepared themselves, asking members of the local community to come and support them and create a 'human wall' in the hope of denying the bailiffs entry and protecting the site. Luckily, the bailiff raid had not come to pass, and the squat remains on site to this day, although it continues to be under constant legal threat. Indeed, on 29 June 2017, the High Court granted a possession order to the landlords of the site, giving the Grow Heathrow residents 14 days to leave⁵⁰. Lawyers for Grow Heathrow had argued that the residents had a right to home under Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1988, and therefore should be allowed to continue to live on the site. However, the judge ruled that this did not overrule Article 1 of the same act, that asserts the right of property possession (Laville 2017). This is the legal enactment of discussions in previous chapters: that the home as a site of shelter, belonging and comfort is understood as having inferior importance to rights to ownership. For Grow Heathrow squatters, too, then, the threat of forced eviction and the loss of home remains an intrinsic part of their

⁵⁰ At the time of writing (26/07/2017), the group remained on site, although this is likely to soon change unless an appeal is granted.

everyday lives, despite its relative security compared to other squats in and around London.

Lily had come to Grow Heathrow because she was struggling to maintain a life that consisted of a cycle of procuring a squat, setting up a home, followed by forced eviction in the South London squatting scene. She felt that despite its own legal struggles, Grow Heathrow remained a relatively secure form of squatting in comparison to what she had been experiencing elsewhere. However, several months after I had first visited her at the site, Lily informed me that she'd moved back to the city because she had found work, and was once again encountering seemingly never-ending experiences of eviction from squatted properties. She was unsure of her next move, no longer wanting to live at the Grow Heathrow site because of its distance from the city centre, making it difficult to sustain work, but equally struggling to maintain a home in inner London. She felt trapped in a position where there was no good outcome: she either moved back to Grow Heathrow and a homelier environment, or she stayed in the more precarious squatting scene in the inner city, where at least she was in local employment.

Constantly having to move from squat to squat meant that who she was living with also altered regularly. She often found herself living with people she hadn't met before, which at times made her feel uneasy. Many of the people who she had squatted with over the years were now giving up on the practice entirely, moving away from London, couch-surfing with friends, or returning to live with parents. Lily felt that the criminalisation of squatting in residential buildings has ultimately led to the *'loss of a squatting community in London'*, and that this loss is *'directly related to section 144'*. She commented that squatting is now *"more stressful, with more risk involved"*. Fear of arrest has deterred many from attempting to squat residential properties. Even when squatting in commercial properties, squatter crews are forced to move from building to building with increasing regularity.

Lily also told me that she and her crew have found it increasingly difficult to find viable empty properties at all, be they residential or commercial, as she has noticed more technological and physical security applied to empty buildings than ever before: *“empty buildings have more security than they used to. Makes it harder to find somewhere you can get open”*. The securitisation of valuable property has therefore led to the further precarisation of home for those who cannot afford property of their own in the city. This in turn further compounds issues of stark spatial exclusion, whereby those on low incomes or carving out subversive lifestyles, such as squatters, are increasingly denied access to housing. This is justified on the basis of the sheer financial value of property in London, and the increasing understanding of housing as a financial asset above and beyond a place of shelter or a home (Lowe et al 2012).

Domicide and securitisation

Harry, another squatter participant, echoed a similar experience of high levels of property securitisation making it difficult to both open and maintain squats. Shortly after section 144 was implemented, he was evicted from a squat in an out-of-business pub in North London. Once he and his crew had been removed, the owners of the property proceeded to spend £400 per night for the installation of security guards in order to ensure it was not squatted again. Harry was appalled by this turn of events, and attributed it in part to section 144 reducing tolerance for squats in commercial, as well as residential, properties⁵¹. Prior to their eviction, he and a large crew had managed to remain in the building for several months. He told me that the crew had become quite well-known,

⁵¹ Although squatting in a residential building remains a civil, rather than criminal, offence and is not subject to the same risk of fining and/or imprisonment, all of the squatters that I spoke with told me that there had also been a crackdown on residential squat evictions since the implementation of section 144.

tolerated and even celebrated within a local community that had very much lamented the idea of their local pub's closure. He referred to the atmosphere in the squatted pub as '*a community space, very social, with people just popping in*'⁵². He told me that local estate agents had agreed to let them into the property if they promised to look after the building and keep it secure, as they feared if left empty it would be vulnerable to vandalism. Harry and his crew were excited to take on the project, opening the building up as a social centre, hosting events, workshops, and establishing a free library and clothing 'swap shop'. They had previously reopened and occupied a local library in the same borough that had been closed down by the local authority due to central government budget cuts. The campaign that ensued had resulted in the local authority, rather than selling the property to developers, instead handing temporary possession to a group of local residents, who now run a community library on the site. Harry said that the success of the library occupation had made the crew popular with locals, and that there was little to no opposition to their presence within the community. He commented that the squats he has been involved in were:

*Inclusive community spaces that were outward-looking in their approach, including members of the local community across a varied spectrum of human existence, not just those associated with the squatting community.*⁵³

Despite this local support, the owners of the pub had them evicted, replacing them with costly security guards to ensure that the building remained empty. He told me that the eviction process had been violent and emotionally overwhelming, with bailiffs and police appearing one afternoon on short notice, giving them little time to prepare themselves to leave, and forcibly removing them from the building.

⁵² Telephone interview, 26/06/2014

⁵³ Face-to-face interview, 16/07/2014

Both Lily and Harry saw this increased private securitisation and increasing regularity of evictions as directly relational to the ever-expanding property market in London, and the ongoing philosophy of privatisation and individualisation that an emphasis on property-as-equity drives. As Lily remarked; *“there is no public land anymore; everything has to be someone’s private space”*. Harry agreed, remarking that section 144 and other Coalition housing policies are borne out of a *“fetishisation of property as commodity as opposed to home”*. Both Harry and Lily saw their experiences of forced eviction as intrinsically bound up in understandings of housing-as-equity, as opposed to housing-as-home. Indeed, the pub Harry had squatted in became a guardianship property shortly after his eviction (the commercialisation of squatting through property guardianship will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter). It has now been re-opened as a gastro and craft beer pub in an area that, like so many swathes of the capital, has seen rapid gentrification and sky-rocketing property values in recent years (Atkinson 2000; Lees et al 2008). When we met in July 2015, Harry, like several of my participants, confessed that he’d recently given up on squatting, as it had become too difficult to maintain living in a cycle of forced eviction. His partner had recently had a baby, and he could not justify putting his young child in such a precarious position. He and his young family had instead begun living as property guardians⁵⁴, something that he felt relatively positive about as a form of affordable housing in the city (although arguably its ability to provide secure housing is not much better than squatting, as eviction notices can range from two weeks to just twenty-four hours).

For Lily, Harry and their crews, like so many other members of the contemporary squatting community, forced eviction has become enmeshed within the everyday, bound to a continual cycle of homemaking and home destruction. For squatters, forced eviction has,

⁵⁴ Property guardianship and its impact on squatting post-section 144 will be discussed in more detail in a latter part of the chapter.

more than ever, become an 'embodied, located and grounded phenomenon' (Brickell 2014: 1257). For people like Lily and Harry, forced eviction is not an acute moment of emergency. Rather it has become an almost normalised element of their relationship with home. Squatters have found themselves at the sharp end of embedded conceptions of what a home should, and equally should not, be, thereby leaving them vulnerable to continual, and politically justified, displacement and dispossession (Brickell et al 2017).

The impact of section 144 on mental wellbeing and vulnerable social groups

Another layer in the compounding forms of domicile experienced by squatters lies in the impact that section 144 has had on mental health and wellbeing. In the context of Cambodian land evictions, the work of Richardson et al (2016) highlighted the clear linkages between experiences of forced eviction and subsequent deterioration in mental health, with impacts ranging from anxiety, to insomnia, to an inability to concentrate. There has, however, been little research that examines the impact of forced eviction on mental health in the context of section 144. Although the SQUASH campaign's detailed 2013 report (produced six months after the law had been passed) highlighted the link between section 144 and the further precarisation of the homeless (SQUASH 2013), large comprehensive studies are yet to be conducted, in part due to the transient and subcultural nature of squatting making it an often elusive subject matter. However, my research found clear connections in some instances between squatting and mental health deterioration, and the highly adverse effect section 144 has had on squatters' mental wellbeing. One participant in particular, Tariq, candidly discussed with me the relationship between his mental health and squatting, and the impact that section 144 in particular had had on his wellbeing.

I met Tariq through a friend of a friend. After a brief chat over the phone, Tariq invited me round to his squat, a disused former pub in Southwark, South London. After a cup of tea and some biscuits (a nation-wide ritual of welcome in all British homes, squat or otherwise), Tariq began to tell me about how and why he had come to squat. He told me that he has always suffered from social anxiety, but that this reached its peak when he went to university, where he found himself struggling in a way that he hadn't felt before:

I found I couldn't do what most people can, getting up, working a nine to five...I did a degree and found turning up to even 25 per cent of my lectures a challenge. I felt alienated from pretty much everything...Mental health issues I guess⁵⁵.

After deciding that he could no longer continue with his degree, Tariq moved in with some friends who were squatting in London while he considered his next move. Several years later, Tariq continues to squat. He credits squatting as having a hugely positive impact on his mental health, providing him with a sense of both freedom and responsibility that he had struggled to find during his time at university. Tariq found a sense of autonomy and empowerment that he had never previously experienced, thriving in the strong sense of community embedded in squatter crews and enjoying living in a communal yet physically and mentally stimulating environment. Squatting requires a strong practical knowledge-base, such as electric work, welding and building reparation, as well as resourcefulness in terms of being able to live on little to no money. Tariq found this at times challenging lifestyle extremely satisfying, giving him a sense of purpose that he had never before felt. As he commented, '*there's something exciting about the challenge of living for free*'. Tariq felt that this challenge gave him a sense of purpose that he

⁵⁵ Face-to-face interview, 16/07/2015.

had not encountered at university: that having to put so much work into his home has given his life meaning and richness.

However, this sense of autonomy and control within the intimate spaces of squatters' everyday lives are being vastly eroded by section 144. Tariq's friend and fellow crew member, Dave, said that during one particularly bad month they had 'lost' five buildings shortly after entering and securing them due both to section 144, and Interim Possession Orders (IPOs) being issued more harshly than prior to the law change. He remarked that this *'...puts a lot of personal strain on crews, particularly when people have to keep the building occupied to keep it safe. It's much more stressful now⁵⁶'*. Tariq found that, whilst he had found squatting to be an antidote to his anxiety and struggles with a standardised nine-to-five existence, the introduction of section 144 had reversed this. Squatting in the post-section 144 landscape has increased his anxiety levels, and he worries about the uncertain future laid out before him, in part due to the increased precarisation of his homemaking practice brought about by the law change. The pleasure he had once taken in the challenges of squatting had now been replaced by an acute sense of anxiety due to being constantly under threat of eviction. He was however determined to continue squatting despite this, as he could not imagine being happy in any other housing environment.

Tariq and his crewmates also acknowledged the changing dynamics in the larger crews that have tended to form in the wake of section 144. This is due to commercial properties, now the mainstay for squatters, needing larger groups of people to occupy and manage them successfully. Larger crews in turn need high levels of organisation, and with lots of strong characters and opinions about how squats should be run, tensions invariably rise. Tariq noted that squats had become particularly potentially threatening places for women. Dave remarked that there has

⁵⁶ Face-to-face interview, 16/07/2015.

certainly always been a gendered dimension to squatting, with it generally understood to be a male-dominated practice:

*There's lots of sexism present in squatting. Squatting lends itself to machismo. Criminality, breaking things, using manual skills. It's 'macho glamour'*⁵⁷

However, they felt that there had been a rise in issues related to sexism since section 144's implementation, with larger crews contributing to women feeling more unsafe due to both larger numbers of men, and the furthered domination of masculine constructions of squatting by competing men in the groups. They told me about a nearby squat/social centre where a female friend of theirs had been living a few months previously. In a group meeting she brought up the fact that she was beginning to feel unsafe in the squat due to some (male) crew members bringing back strangers at night. She was reportedly told that if she couldn't handle living there, then she should move. Tariq and Dave understood the event to be in part a consequence of section 144, as smaller squats are now nearly impossible to establish or join, therefore leaving women in particular exposed to potentially threatening situations and behaviours. Lily told me a similar story of a squat she had recently lived in, where she and her fellow female crew mates had raised the issue of misogyny in the group, only for their experiences and opinions to be dismissed by many in the crew. These accounts certainly fit with a relationship between women and precarious housing (or lack of housing) that sees them regularly more vulnerable in low and no-income housing institutions such as homeless shelters (as well as street homelessness) that are often understood to be male-dominated, with women often under increased threat from physical, verbal and sexual violence in such spaces (see Rose 1993; Radley et al 2006). Clearly the forcing together of large groups of people, who often don't know each

⁵⁷ Face-to-face interview, 16/07/2015.

other particularly well, rather than smaller, more select squatting groups, has in part furthered a reduction in the safety and well-being within squats for women.

There have however been some clear attempts by some squatting communities to combat the misogyny present in some aspects of squatting culture. One collective, known as 'House of Brag', opened up the London Queer Social Centre in an abandoned commercial property in Brixton in summer 2014 in order to establish a queer safe space for the squatting community. As their mission statement states:

***What is LQSC?** The London Queer Social Centre is a squatted, volunteer-run, non-commercial project intended to provide a large free-to-use space available to queer/activist/liberation/radical and local communities to organise, network, share ideas, relax and have fun.*

We prioritise providing a space and a platform to voices that otherwise have difficulty being heard. We would like to hear from groups fighting oppression both here and abroad, from people with stories to tell and ideas to share (House of Brag 2014).

During the two weeks that it was open, LQSC ran a variety of workshops and events, ranging from squatting skills, to yoga, to sex and feminism discussion groups, to queer film screenings. When I visited the squat one evening, there was a group discussion about how better to protect women and LGBTQI+ squatters from the culture of machismo often identified within squatting. There were certainly no clear answers, but those involved in the discussion were clearly conscious of the prevalence of some of these issues present within squatting culture, and how this had in part been exacerbated by the need for larger crews in the post-section 144 landscape. During the discussion, there was a strict policy, whereby people were not allowed to talk over one another or interject, and women and LGBTQI+ people who wished to contribute to the discussion were given priority. This formed part of the collective's 'Safer

Spaces Policy' that focuses on giving voice to those most marginalised in the community (House of Brag 2014).

However, although it is certainly encouraging that crews are taking steps to combat issues of misogyny within squatting, these steps are inherently hindered by the fact that squatting has become so much more transient in the wake of section 144. The LQSC, whilst an important safe space for those who may feel marginalised by elements of squatting culture, ultimately only ran for two weeks before being evicted. This is an extremely short period of time within which to provide a clear voice for particularly vulnerable members of the squatting community. Whilst prior to section 144 squats, both residential and commercial, were more likely to be regularly established for months or years at a time, the law change has removed the opportunity to create alternative squatted spaces for any even remotely long-term period of time.

Section 144 therefore unmakes the homespace in way that particularly impacts the everyday wellbeing of those who are already most vulnerable. The law change dismantles the homemaking capacities of those who are already living with mental health issues, exacerbating people's existing conditions, and instigating the development of new vulnerabilities. This occurs as the policies begin to root themselves into the everyday lifespaces of squatters, increasing their vulnerability and reducing their sense of wellbeing in what are already precarious housing circumstances, particularly for those who experience mental health issues, and vulnerable groups such as women and LGBTQI+ people. Displacement therefore becomes not just about material loss at a particular moment in time. It becomes embedded as an ongoing condition of squatting as a practice, with squatters left socially and culturally, as well as physically, drifting and placeless as a consequence of section 144. This is what Delaney acknowledges as the culmination of experiential – material displacement and discursive displacement: of the momentary and the embedded (Delaney 2004).

This is a particularly cruel incarnation of domicide, whereby those most likely to already be living lives more precarious than most are the ones that are most likely to see the destruction of their homemaking capacities. Perhaps more damaging still, the implementation of such policies furthers a socio-political discourse that such forms of domicide are a social and political necessity; their rhetorical framing as pragmatic solutions to austerity normalising the precarisation of those that are most vulnerable. This normalisation in itself further compounds precarious lives through a concurrent, and somewhat paradoxical, process of both the appropriation and demonisation of squatting culture, as the following part of this chapter will discuss.

Normalising precarity, appropriating squatting

For squatters whose ability to secure and maintain squats has been severely reduced in the post-section 144 city, the home acts as a site through which power relations and the precarisation of London's poorest are enacted. Neoliberal governance structures that infiltrate the everyday home lives of citizens instil 'life worlds that are inflected with uncertainty and instability' (Waite 2009: 416). Section 144 is a clear example of such a relationship between power hierarchies, governance practices and the everyday, enacted specifically through the site of the home. Such structures of power not only entrench precarity into the homelives of society's most vulnerable, but go so far as to normalise this precarity. The precarised homespace becomes absorbed into the mundane and everyday structures of the lifeworlds of those deemed incompatible with the individualised and equity-driven citizens envisaged by neoliberal agendas. In the context of the housing crisis, this normalisation of precarity has been conducted through two interconnected avenues. Firstly, normalisation is achieved through a reappropriation of the very homemaking denounced by government policy; essentially taking countercultural living or ideas of subsidised

housing and re-establishing them within the sphere of neoliberal ideologies. This reappropriation can be seen clearly in regards to squatting in relation to the rising popularity of guardianship schemes in London. Secondly, the normalisation of precarity occurs through socio-symbolic forms of domicile that retrench demonised notions of both the squatter and the social tenant through section 144 and the bedroom tax being framed as decisions based on the (im)morality of squatters and social tenants (to be discussed in relation to social tenants and the bedroom tax in the following chapter). Both the appropriation of squatting for commercial gain, and the retrenchment of understandings of squatters as being societally parasitical will be highlighted in the remainder of this chapter as further instances of compounded domicile.

Reappropriating precarious living

Strategies of reappropriation and the normalisation of precarity have been adopted in relation to section 144 particularly through the rise of guardianship schemes. Originating in the Netherlands during the 1990s to allow cheap and temporary ‘work/live’ spaces for artists and students, guardianship firms are private companies that install ‘property guardians’ into disused (usually commercial) property, in order to keep buildings ‘safe’ from squatters (Ferrerri et al 2017). Landlords pay the firm a fee for finding the guardians, and the guardians in turn also pay the firm lower than average rent to live in the property on the understanding that they can be given just two weeks’ notice (maximum)⁵⁸ to vacate the property, and are completely void of any tenancy rights.

Therefore, just as squatting has been criminalised, so has it simultaneously been repurposed for commercial means under the guise of guardianship schemes. Property guardianship firms promote the

⁵⁸ Although it has been known for notice to be as little as 48 hours.

schemes under the premise of a cheap cost of living, the chance to inhabit unusual and interesting spaces, and as an enactment of social responsibility; that the properties will be protected from the perceived threat of squatters (Ferrerri et al 2017; Dawson and Ferreri, forthcoming). According to Camelot, one of the best known guardianship firms:

Property owners turn to us to manage their vacant properties, looking to deter squatters and avoid vandalism. This in turn gives Camelot access to some of the UK's most exciting and sought after buildings (Camelot 2015).

Even politically left-wing media, such as *The Guardian* newspaper, have tended to promote the scheme relatively uncritically as something of an adventure; an opportunity to live in and revive unusual properties (Norwood 2010). Guardianship schemes extend beyond the normalisation of precarious urban living, to the active celebration and conscious marketisation of temporary living, often in commercial properties, as an exciting and desirable opportunity. This is despite the lack of any form of tenure security.

Guardianships form a dangerous contribution to domicile in relation to squatting in two key ways. Firstly, they reduce the number of empty properties suitable for squatting. This is a particularly prevalent issue in the post-section 144 landscape, where the majority of squatters now deem residential properties off-limits due to the threat of arrest and fining. As the majority of guardianship properties are commercial buildings, this further reduces squatters' ability to find and establish a home. Indeed, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, Harry admitted to me that he had recently abandoned squatting and moved into a guardianship himself. He remarked; *'it's just getting harder and harder [to squat] ...I can't afford much so being a property guardian seemed like the way to go*

*for now*⁵⁹. Despite the commercial nature of guardianship schemes, Harry felt that he was left with little option in the face of an ever-declining squatting movement, seeing becoming a guardian as the closest thing to squatting that he could manage, at least for the time being. He and his partner had recently had a child, and he felt that this, coupled with the increasing hardship that squatting entailed, meant that the practice was no longer viable for him. He also felt relatively positive about the place of guardianship schemes in London's housing landscape, stating that *'I see it as a good form of housing'*. He felt that it alluded to the same principles of squatting in some ways, namely the use of otherwise empty space, and that it provided less commitment and more security for him than squatting could:

There is a real sense of time being taken up 'being a squatter' if you are squatting. It takes up everything. Guardianships are still a lot less than rent, and they are less-time consuming.

Guardianship schemes therefore play an interesting role at the, somewhat paradoxical, intersection of increasing demand for affordable housing, and the stripping away of housing security exacerbated by policies such as section 144, that demonstrably reduce affordable living options. This makes guardianships all the more ominous, functioning as a means of remaining in the city in the short term, whilst simultaneously contributing to the further reduction of viable homespaces for low-income and vulnerable people in the long term⁶⁰.

Harry's decision is a controversial one among squatters, who often see moving into guardianships as a cultural and ideological betrayal of squatting. As Dave remarked *'I think moving into a guardianship is a sure-fire way to lose friends!'* However, Dave's crewmate Matteo sympathised

⁵⁹ Face-to face interview, 16/07/2014

⁶⁰ Unlike squatters, property guardians tend to have middling incomes. They tend to be young professionals, and particularly attracts those working in creative industries. For a more detailed discussion, see Ferreri et al 2017.

with squatters like Harry, acknowledging that squatting is becoming an increasingly unsustainable struggle, and that the move of some squatters into guardianship schemes may therefore be a somewhat inevitable consequence of section 144; *'it's sad, sure [that squatters move into guardianships], but ultimately you can't begrudge anyone for trying to put a roof over their heads'*⁶¹. Indeed, although not living in a guardianship scheme themselves, Tariq, Dave and their crewmate Matteo told me that they had themselves signed a lease with the owners of the disused pub they were squatting. The lease guaranteed their right to remain in the building for six months, and they were not obliged to pay rent for the first eight months. I was told that the owners had made this decision because, unlike the popular narrative that squatters are a scourge to property owners, causing harm to the value of buildings, the owners of this particular building had acknowledged that having squatters could actually prove to be a financial asset. This is because by having a signed lease with the crew, the owners were no longer liable to pay business rates, and the squatters were there to protect the building from vandals, making retaining the pub cost-neutral, at least for the time being. In essence, the owner of the Southwark pub had made an arrangement with Dave and his crew that was close to the economic structure of a guardianship scheme, but without third party involvement, without the exchange of money, and ironically with a more established sense of security, as the crew had been guaranteed the right to remain in the squat for at least eight months. The crew were arguably working austerity and financial recession to their advantage, capitalising on a small business owner's desire to save money in financially stringent times. This is a form of interstitial 'ad hoc urbanism', whereby austerity is re-utilised and appropriated to form a momentary feeling of security (Tonkiss 2013).

Dave commented that in the post-section 144 landscape, many crews have had to conduct similar negotiations with property owners,

⁶¹ Face-to-face interview, 16/07/2015

somewhat akin to guardianship schemes, due to the ever-declining availability of suitable squats. This partial merging of the principles of squatting with the economic structure of guardianships is something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, such deals enable squats to survive for longer in an increasingly precarious climate. On the other, they simultaneously threaten to erode the countercultural, autonomous nature of squatting by tying squatters into contractual arrangements with property owners. Even though they continued to live rent-free in the pub, and were not part of a guardianship scheme, Dave admitted that he felt uneasy about the contract:

Signing deals is ultimately for the benefit of the landlord, but our hands are tied in a lot of ways. People have to make deals with landlords now in order to stay put...squatting isn't a pure form of protest anymore.

Dave felt loathe to contribute to a landlord benefitting economically from their squatting the property, as this was something he felt ideologically opposed to. And yet, in the current climate, he and his crewmates were having to make concessions in order to ensure some level of security in their home. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the extreme and acute level of encounter with the process of forced eviction, to the point where it becomes a weekly occurrence for some, including Dave, is clearly not conducive to sustainable home-making, even in the short term. Striking deals with property owners was therefore a non-ideal, yet necessary decision for the crew.

To return to property guardianships, alongside the increased entrenchment of the schemes in London that both reduces the number of suitable properties available to squatting crews, and normalises precarious urban housing structures more broadly, they also aesthetically appropriate squatting as a cultural practice. The appeal of life as a property guardian in part lies in the opportunity to live in unusual buildings, for example former warehouses or schools, and to live

communally, often with a relatively large number of people. This ethos of communal living and the creative re-use of empty property is clearly aligned with elements of squatting culture, and communal living more broadly.

Guardianship schemes are therefore an appropriation of the aesthetics of squatting, whilst at the same time being completely at odds with the political ethic behind many people's decision to squat. More broadly speaking, guardianship schemes form a contribution to an aesthetic urban trend, particularly in the post-recession climate, that envisions temporariness and the repurposing of property as something that is inherently positive and entrepreneurial (Harris 2015). This is notable in the commercial, as well as housing, sectors, particularly in relation to the rise of the 'pop-up' phenomena, a now somewhat ubiquitous term that largely denotes the interim use of vacant commercial properties. Pop-up bars, shops and cafes are now commonplace in London, particularly in gentrified, or gentrifying, parts of the city, generally attracting a young, white, middle-class clientele. Along with guardianships, their aesthetic is relatively consistent and easily recognisable, despite occupying a wide array of building types. This often includes a 'shabby chic' appearance, for example through exposed brickwork and mismatched furniture, and the retention of some objects or style that allude to the building's past use (Harris 2012; Stylonnylon.com 2014). For example, the 'Hackney Hardware' bar in a former hardware shop retained an imaginative and aesthetic connection to the property's past usage, both in name and through the shop's original features being repurposed to form part of the bar. An acquaintance of mine lived as a property guardian in a former pub in East London, still decked out with bar and dartboard, with the pub sign still hanging from the side of the building, despite the fact that it had been closed for several years. This trend can in part be understood as a form of 'post-recession gentrification', whereby a neighbourhood's working-class heritage and history is repurposed for wealthier incomers (Lees 2000: 390). This is what Harris terms 'the production and re-imagining of urban space for more affluent social groups' (2012: 235).

This aesthetic, while conscious in relation to pop-up and guardianship marketing strategies, are something of an incidental by-product of squatting. This is particularly true in the criminalised landscape, where squatters are more likely to be living in commercial properties, such as former pubs, for increasingly short time periods. And yet, although very much politically and culturally opposed to one another, the connections between squatting and these particular gentrification processes are very much in existence. In a discussion we had about some of the changes taking place within the squatting scene, and London more broadly, Dave expressed concern regarding this connection. He both defended and lamented the relationship between squatting and gentrification:

There are definitely tensions between gentrification and squatting. Squatting is anti-gentrification, but feeds into it at the same time. Squatting can generate an "edgy culture." But we haven't got any control over that.

Dave's acknowledgement of the relationship between squatter and gentrification aesthetics points to a form of domicile that is particularly ominous, whereby the practice of squatting is slowly strangled by forms of marketing and sale strategies that feed off some of the very ideals and aesthetics embedded within squatting. During my time at the Southwark squat, this was one of the few points during our conversation that Dave appeared somewhat defeated, seemingly frustrated by the somewhat cruel irony that the aesthetics of his way of life are in some ways inspiring gentrification practices that are in part contributing to the ultimate downfall of his lifestyle⁶².

The growing precarisation of squatting due to section 144 and the implementation of schemes such as guardianships that further

⁶² Although, Dave, Tariq and Matteo found an ingenious means of tapping into this very same aesthetic in order to help protect their homespace, as will be discussed in Chapter 8.

deconstruct squatting culture, has left a marked strain on those that continue to maintain squatting as a homemaking practice. This is everyday domicide at its most literal and material. As guardianship schemes seep into London's empty commercial properties, squatting threatens to be reduced to an extinct subculture, driven from abandoned sites of the city by the threat of prosecution in the case of residential properties, and limited site options and forced commercialisation in the case of commercial ones.

This commercialisation of precarious living also further strengthens the relationship between property and equity, in turn extending moralised perceptions of figures such as the squatter and the social tenant as socially parasitical. The acceptance of insecure tenancies and precarious housing as the status quo engenders further resentment towards those that either do not pay rent (squatters) or those whose rent is below market value and attached to secure lifetime tenancies (social tenants). Such normalisation of the precarisation of the homespace is a mode of intimate governance that ultimately reframes expectations of home and security. Where once affordable housing for life formed one of the bastions of post-World War II society in the UK, now those who want or need to live in cheaper housing are expected to embrace temporary and precarious lifestyles.

The most concerning domicidal aspects of section 144 (and the bedroom tax), therefore, do not solely lie in the immediate impacts of the threat of forced eviction, financial and emotional precarity, and inhibited homemaking capacity discussed thus far in this chapter, although these are of course integral to our understanding of the policies' impacts. The *socio-symbolic* component of domicide, too, stand to have a long-term impact on the home lives of London's low and no-income residents. As I have discussed in previous work⁶³ (see Nowicki 2014; 2017a), processes of domicide should not be understood solely as the physical destruction of or displacement from the homespace, but also as a rhetorically-

⁶³ See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the term.

charged process whereby particular types of home are dismantled through structuring them and their occupants as morally dubious. Taking this one step further, then, property guardianships enact a socio-symbolic domicide not only by reducing the number of properties available for squatting, but by producing a rhetoric that at once constructs squatting as something that property owners need to be protected from, and as a mode of living that should be paid for by those wanting to experience lifestyles akin to that of a squat.

The final section of this chapter focuses on the entrenchment of socio-symbolic domicide in regards to the fourth key impact of section 144, exploring the ways in which the law change enhances figurations of squatters as abject deviants (Tyler 2013). This final section also examines the ways in which, even in instances where squatters *are* understood to be socially and politically responsible, simplified binary understandings of squatting ultimately threaten its existence as a practice, primarily by undermining associations between squatting and homemaking.

Consolidating the socially parasitical squatter trope

As traced throughout this chapter, section 144 is a clear instance of domicide. The law change incites the precarisation of the homespace via forced eviction (and the threat of), and instils instability and a lack of autonomy into the everyday lifeworlds of squatters. What is also integral to the domicidal nature of section 144, however, are the ways in which it furthers a public affectation that structures squatters as deviant, abject citizens. Section 144 (and the bedroom tax, to be discussed in the following chapter) form part of a dualistic structure; they are both the consequence of existing and ongoing neoliberal governance structures (as discussed in Chapter 5), and equally function as policies that further extend these negative figurations. Domicide in this instance can be

developed beyond solely the destruction of or the removal from the material homespace to include the ways in which marginalised groups are excluded from the right to home. The remainder of this chapter considers these social, political and cultural manifestations of home destruction present within section 144 (Nowicki 2014).

What is particularly integral to the socio-symbolic domicidal impact of section 144 is the ways in which it legally structures a criminal/victim binary, the squatter rendered a figure that the law-abiding property-owner should see as a threat to be dispelled. The criminalisation of squatting legally frames long-standing assumptions around squatting as a tactical avoidance of social contribution, a form of theft in which deviant, abject figures take advantage of the financial rewards (in the form of property) hard-earned by their victims, the idealised property-acquiring citizen. Although these imaginaries of the squatter are far from new within popular myth and public psyche (see Platt 1999; Reeve 2015, and the discussions in Chapter 5), they have been exacerbated and justified through section 144 via its restructuring the figure of the squatter as criminal through a legal, as well as socio-political, lens. As an acquaintance commented when I described my research to them; *'well they must've made it illegal for a reason'*. Negative figurations and an entrenched suspicion of the squatter have therefore been further compounded by the official reframing of their status as illegal.

This multifaceted socio-symbolic domicile is complicated further by the compounding of figurations of criminality and illegality alongside an essentialist depiction of squatters that often also defines them within a 'good vs. bad squatter' binary. In public, political, and indeed academic, rhetoric, squatting is often understood as either a product of hedonism and anti-social behaviour, or it is framed as a political movement or a means of shelter for homeless people. The sociologist Hans Pruijt outlined a framework of urban squatting, defining four squatting typologies: deprivation-based; entrepreneurial (setting up an establishment such as a social centre with little resources and the

avoidance of bureaucracy); conventional squatting (squatting to protect the cityscape from redevelopment); and political squatting (Pruijt 2013). These categories understand the decision-making processes behind squatting to be based either on a lack of alternative housing options, or the desire to oppose a city's political structures.

These categories are certainly commonplace within London's squatting scene, with the majority of my participants practising squatting for one the reasons outlined by Pruijt, at least in part. We should nonetheless be careful in defining squatters solely through such frameworks that often centre on the justification of squatting as a necessary and/or politically noble practice. I argue that the very process of justifying squatting establishes an understanding in social and political psyche that squatting as a practice *needs to be justified*, that it cannot be understood simply as another form of homemaking in the city. This habitual categorisation of squatters that define them as either societally abject hedonists, or politically active citizens draw parallels with the ways in which the poor more generally are categorised as either deserving or undeserving. This is a by now long-familiar trope in British depictions of the poor and working class, whereby those on low or no-incomes are understood in binary terms as either workshy scroungers or infantilised, helpless victims of their circumstance (see for example Reeve 2015; Welshman 2013). Such binary portrayals of the reasons behind people's financial, social and housing situations are dangerously reductive. For squatters, these understandings of squatting and its meaning as a practice take on a dual-edged form of domicile, whereby the homemaking capacities of squatters are unmade regardless of the category they fall into. For those understood as 'bad squatters', section 144 is positioned as a justified response to degenerate living. For 'good squatters', their squats are understood as sites of political action or urban preservation before they are understood as homespaces. Whereas the majority of us are rarely, if ever, forced to justify the existence of our homes, 'good squatters' are constantly required to justify their housing circumstances beyond the basic desire for home.

This can at times lead to resentment and social fatigue on the part of the squatter. Particularly in the post-section 144 landscape, squatters are often left feeling further obliged to prove their status as ‘good squatters’ (i.e. being active in the local community, preserving buildings, etc.) in order to justify their existence and sustain their homemaking capacity, further entrenching binary understandings of the subculture. Some of the squatters interviewed as part of this research commented that they felt a sense of resentment due to continuously having to prove themselves as ‘good squatters’ that were not seeking to take advantage of or dupe landlords into lengthy court battles. One participant, Roberta, felt particularly perturbed by this constant demand for self-justification, as she felt her actions as a squatter should ultimately not be of anyone else’s concern. As she remarked, *‘all I’m guilty of is using an abandoned building in a ridiculously expensive city, where affordable housing doesn’t really exist’*⁶⁴. Roberta felt that section 144 had created a ‘backlash’ whereby some squatters, enraged by a sense of legal persecution, were rejecting any calls to prove themselves as responsible or community-facing. She referred to this as a *‘fuck you’* mentality: *‘a lot of people are pissed off. Why should we be out there having to “prove ourselves”?’*. When we met, Roberta had recently stopped squatting, as she felt that it was ultimately too tiring and life-consuming in the aftermath of section 144 to continue with any sense of long-termism. She had instead recently joined a housing co-operative in South London, which she felt would provide her with more stability, which in turn would allow her to commit more time to the radical housing collective she is already heavily involved in. She ultimately saw this as preferable to having to constantly justify her decision to squat to other people.

For some, however, the act of having to prove oneself as a ‘good squatter’ continues to create negative implications in terms of their relationship with their squat as home. Grace has been squatting in London for several years, and, unsurprisingly, has found it increasingly difficult to find and

⁶⁴ Face-to-face interview, 08/07/2014

maintain a viable home, particularly since the implementation of section 144. When we met, Grace was studying for a Master's degree, and squatting provided a means of surviving in the city on little to no income. However, constantly moving from place to place had inevitably impacted on her studies, as the time and labour involved in securing and maintaining a squat inevitably brings with it the constant stress of eviction (and threats of). This greatly limited her ability to concentrate on her degree and assessments. She described cycling round London for days on end, hunting for new empty properties to occupy, regularly to no avail. She was relieved, then, when she and a group of friends found an abandoned former postal sorting office in south-east London. Grace decided that the best tactic for securing the building for as long as possible would be to contact the owner of the property and try to negotiate some kind of temporary agreement with them (an increasingly commonplace tactic, as discussed earlier). The landlady was open to making a deal with Grace and her friends, telling them that she would allow them to remain in the property over the coming winter for around three months, as long as they looked after the building, and promised not to contest the eviction notice once it had been issued (the squat, being a commercial property, is not subject to section 144).

Although grateful that she had somewhere to stay over the next few months that would allow her to concentrate on her studies, Grace also felt somewhat resentful that she had to make such promises and negotiate such deals in the first place: *'it annoys me that we have to jump through all these hoops, when they're [landlords] the ones leaving these places empty'*⁶⁵. Grace commented that she also felt pressure from local residents, as well as the property owner, to adhere to certain figurations of the 'good squatter'; although the motivations behind the uptake of this rhetoric was vastly different among local residents than that of the landlady. Local residents were generally supportive of Grace and her crew living in the property, as it is a building that holds historic

⁶⁵ Face to face interview, 15/10/2014.

significance in the local area. Local residents had been campaigning to put an end to the property owner's plans to demolish and regenerate the sorting office into high-end private housing. Grace told me that a local group leading the campaign to save the building from demolition assumed that her crew were also committed to preserving the building, and wrote to them requesting their involvement with the campaign. She noted, somewhat bemused, that:

They wanted us to write a manifesto stating why we want the building to be saved...[but] this isn't about the building...it's about me having a home, having a roof over my head.

Grace's decision to squat in the former sorting office had little to do with a desire to preserve its architectural heritage; she was simply making use of an empty building in order to provide a home for herself.

The assumptions made by local residents, although almost certainly well-intentioned, that Grace and her crew were squatting to protect the building's heritage rather than establish a home for themselves, inadvertently contributes to a rhetoric that detaches squatting from homemaking practices in the public psyche, and in particular masks the precariousness entrenched in Grace's everyday life. Rather than acknowledge Grace and her crewmates' need for a home, the campaign group were instead focused on the architectural precarity of the building. For Grace, squatting is not predominately a political statement, but a decision made as a consequence of limited housing options in the city. A struggling student with little financial means or family support, Grace sees squatting as a viable solution to London's spiralling unaffordability: a solution vastly reduced by the implementation of section 144. As the assumptions made by the local campaign group show, squatting is in some ways endangered further still by rhetorics centred on the idea that a 'good squatter' is someone committed to the needs of the local community. This is due to the fact that these understandings of the

rationale behind squatting fail to acknowledge it as a homemaking practice, therefore in some ways leaving it exposed to legislation and policy that might further distance it from rhetorics of home.

The squat I visited that fell most clearly into the ‘good squat’ trope was undoubtedly Grow Heathrow, the longstanding squat discussed earlier in the chapter. During the afternoon and evening we spent together at the Grow Heathrow site, Lily also raised concerns regarding the potential dangers of the ‘good/bad squatter’ binary. For the majority of its existence, Grow Heathrow and its collective of residents have been portrayed as the epitome of the ‘good squatter’ figuration. When we talked about why Grow Heathrow was seen in such a good light compared to most other squats in and around London, Lily felt that the squat’s comparative long-termism has contributed in large part to its popularity with local people, who see the site as an asset to the community and regularly interact with the squatters. This is encouraged by the Grow Heathrow collective holding gardening days, school trips and for the most part being open to the public. Its image has also been aided by the unusually flattering press coverage it has received over the years, on both the left and right (see for example Dangerfield 2012; Williams 2013). She remarked that;

[the squat] is good at providing an alternative image to squatting, and has had amazing media coverage. It’s popular because of its restorative relationship with the land...it’s really changed people’s ideas of what a squatter is, especially in the local area...it smashes through stereotypes⁶⁶

The nature of this particular squat appeals to depictions of the figure of the ‘good squatter’: one who is environmentally conscious, restorative rather than destructive, and connected to the wider community; the figuration of squatting termed ‘conservational squatting’ in Pruijt’s

⁶⁶ Face to face interview, 14/07/2015.

framework (2013). As discussed above, the goal of the conservational squatter according to Pruijt “involves squatting as a tactic used in the preservation of a cityscape or landscape” (Pruijt 2013: 34). The principle behind the Grow Heathrow squat is clearly linked to the restoration and preservation of the landscape, as well as being centred on raising awareness of climate change and the negative environmental contribution of a third runway at Heathrow Airport. In the press, the squatters tend to be defined in relation to their commitment to reducing carbon emissions and contributing to urban farming and collective gardening, often being positioned as ‘green-fingered’ squatters (Dangerfield 2012; Williams 2013). Lily felt confident that this somewhat unique portrayal of squatting was hugely positive for the Grow Heathrow site, and had contributed to its longevity in what are undoubtedly particularly precarious times for squatting communities. This should not be undervalued and ignored: clearly acquiring the ‘good squatter’ mantle can be beneficial for increasing squatters’ housing security. However, it must also be acknowledged that, as with Grace and the former postal sorting building, there remains a concern that such narratives continue to side-line understandings of squats as home.

What was certainly apparent to me even from a short period of time spent at the Grow Heathrow site was that, as well as a site of economic and political protest, it was very much home for the people who lived there. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the interiors of the structures designed and built by the crew catered to their domestic needs, such as spaces for communal activity, as well as areas set aside for solitude and rest. Interiors were decorated, rugs scattered the floor of the kitchen/living room space, photographs and artwork hung from the walls, and handmade curtains of a variety of colours and materials adorned handmade windows. Grow Heathrow is certainly an important site for community activism and awareness raising around climate change. But for a relatively large group of people it is also home.

Indeed, whilst Lily discussed the positive response this style of squatting elicited from the wider public in comparison to the usual figurations of squatters as abject deviants, she also acknowledged the danger of falling into the trap of such essentialist binary depictions. She commented that the popularity of Grow Heathrow:

Reinforces the idea of 'good squatters' versus 'bad squatters', which in the end is no good for squatting...it's dangerous and impossible to simplify [squatting] in this way.

Once again, framings of squatters, even when positive in nature, dismantle their connection with homemaking, for the vast majority the key factor in their decision to squat in the first instance, no matter how politically engaged they also were. Indeed, every squatter that participated in this research stated a lack of financial resource and a need for shelter as the predominant reason that they squatted. Categorisations elicited by scholars such as Pruijt therefore threaten to vastly over-simplify the decision-making factors that lie behind squatting, detracting from the value of the squat as home, and thus ultimately threatening to exacerbate the challenges squatters face in the post-section 144 city. It would appear that even leftist and activist depictions of squatting may also ultimately endanger the homelives of squatters, framing squatting as a direct response to environmental, political and social ills, and inadvertently masking the desire for homespace and shelter that remains at the core of the majority of people's decision to squat.

Notions of the good and bad squatter therefore both ultimately lead to impacts for squatters that are socio-symbolic in their nature. The bad squatter trope continues to inflict a mythology upon the public psyche that squatters are devious property thieves, sneaking into unsuspecting absent homeowners' houses. This is furthered all the more by the implementation of section 144, which legally frames squatters as criminal, further discrediting the relationship between squatting and

homemaking. It is equally important to note, however, that the alternative narrative of the good squatter is just as fantastical and potentially also domicidal in its impact on the homemaking capacities of squatters, therefore potentially further entrenching their precarious state. Assumptions around the good squatter as forging the squat on the basis of environmental sustainability or political protest also further detaches squatting from conceptions of the home. Furthermore, these assumptions entrench the idea of temporariness and precarity within the squat as acceptable as squatting is seen primarily as an intervention that seeks to meet some conservational or political end point, rather than being an establishment of home.

This chapter has examined the ways in which section 144 has had multifaceted domicidal implications that have seeped into the everyday lifeworlds of squatters. This highlights the complex and far-reaching nature of policies that target the homelives of low-income citizens. This has been demonstrated through four key impacts. Firstly, through section 144 reconstituting forced eviction from an acute moment of crisis to an experience bound up in the everyday. Secondly, the impact of the law change on those who are already vulnerable, such as those living with mental health conditions, or particularly vulnerable social groups such as women. Thirdly, the commercialised reappropriation of squatting as a practice contributing to its demise. Finally, I highlighted the ways in which section 144 contributes to the further entrenchment of squatting as a binary 'good/bad' practice. Together, these amount to a suite of domicidal implications that compound precarity and dismantle squatters' homemaking practices, cross-cutting through their everyday lives. The following chapter will consider the ways in which the bedroom tax, too, is an act of domicile that has multiple compounding elements that contribute to the increased precarisation of social tenants' lives.

Chapter 7

'Just because I don't own it, doesn't mean it's not mine': the bedroom tax and the right to home

The following chapter outlines the multiple impacts of the bedroom tax on social tenants penalised by the policy. As in the previous chapter, discussion of these impacts are divided into four categories. Firstly, the threat of forced eviction as an everyday lived experience within the homespace. Secondly, the impact of the policy on the mental health, wellbeing of those living with physical disabilities. Thirdly, the way in which the Coalition government simultaneously introduced the bedroom tax in part as a condemnation of state supported housing, whilst simultaneously furthering other avenues of state support in relation to homeownership, namely in the form of Help to Buy schemes. Finally, I examine the socio-symbolic implications of the bedroom tax that not only contribute to understandings of social tenants as undeserving of their homes, but also encourage an understanding among social tenants *themselves* that they are not worthy of the right to home through a process defined by Caldeira as the 'dilemma of classification' (2001). The chapter concludes by arguing that the bedroom tax destroys the homemaking capacities of social tenants through multiple means that instil a compounded form of domicide which makes it increasingly difficult for social tenants to both find security and longevity in their homes, and justify the existence of their status as social tenants at all.

The threat of forced eviction

As discussed in the previous chapter, for squatters, the threat of forced eviction via section 144 has entrenched a permanent state of precarity into their everyday lifeworlds, with some participants informing me that

they had been evicted from several properties in the space of a month. For social tenants affected by the bedroom tax, experiences of forced eviction are comparatively far less common. The bedroom tax does not automatically lead to forced eviction: rather it tends to instigate the infiltration of the *fear* of forced eviction into the everyday lifeworlds of tenants. This occurs through the policy leading to rent arrears, as many tenants are no longer able to pay their rent in full due to the loss of housing benefit income that occurs as a consequence of the policy. Indeed, several participants told me that the bedroom tax had led them to fall into rent arrears for the first time. The bedroom tax's relationship with forced eviction and displacement therefore functions differently to the ways in which section 144 interacts with forced eviction processes. Rather than literally forcibly evicting people from their homes, the bedroom tax instead tends to disempower peoples' relationship with their homes through stripping away their sense of belonging, security and comfort, traditionally understood to be the pillars of an ideal home life (Relph 1978; Blunt and Dowling 2006). Tenants are instead left in a position whereby the homes they may have lived in for decades under the premise of secured lifetime tenancies have been transformed into sites of insecurity and financial strain.

This was highlighted as a primary concern by some of the housing association and housing charity employees that I interviewed. Amy, a housing officer whose role is jointly funded by a large national housing association and a west inner London local authority, runs a drop-in advice service for local residents. The drop-in is run in a local community centre and hosts a range of charities and other support services and agencies, including a housing solicitor and surgeries with the constituency's local councillors and MP. I joined Amy at the drop-in centre in December 2014 to discuss what, if any, changes she had noticed in the aftermath of the Welfare Reform Act. I was particularly interested in whether the reasons for people attending the drop-in had changed in the wake of the act's implementation. She told me what she had been most struck by was the increasing number of people who were now

coming in for advice on how to deal with mounting debt. She commented that most people she had spoken to who were affected by the bedroom tax did not want to leave their homes or their local area due to strong emotional ties and support networks, but that as a consequence of the policy, along with the introduction of the benefit cap⁶⁷, many people can no longer afford to live in the borough without falling into high levels of debt.

Amy also noted that although there had been a clear increase in people coming in for advice in relation to the bedroom tax, this had peaked and in fact started to decline in recent months. Amy understood this to be because people were either receiving financial support in the form of Discretionary Housing Payment (or DHP, to be discussed in more detail in the following chapter), or are learning to cope with a reduction in income. However, she ascertained from speaking to clients that ‘coping’ usually meant continuing to fall into arrears, with people unable to avoid indebtedness due to their low incomes. Ultimately, these coping strategies are temporary and unsustainable, as DHP funding has been cut year on year (by £40million in 2015) (Brown 2015), and inevitably the further people fall into arrears, the higher the risk of forced eviction becomes. Jeff, the principal solicitor for a major national housing charity that I spoke with in October 2014 was also extremely concerned about the long-term financial ramifications for social tenants falling into rent arrears as a consequence of the bedroom tax. He commented that:

⁶⁷ The benefit cap, introduced in April 2013 as part of the Welfare Reform Act, limits the total amount of benefits a household can receive. Outside of Greater London, the cap sits at £384.62 per week for a couple or single adult with dependent children living with them, and £257.69 for single people without dependent living with them. In Greater London, the cap is slightly higher: £442.31 per week for a couple or single adult with dependent children living with them, £296.35 for single people without dependent children living with them (Gov.UK, no date).

The full impact of the bedroom tax remains to be seen, and could take many years, as DHP acts as a cloak for the true impact of the bedroom tax⁶⁸⁶⁹.

Temporary financial support from DHP and the relatively slow-moving nature of rent arrears in terms of it leading to forced eviction⁷⁰ left both Jeff and Amy concerned that the full impact of the bedroom tax is not one that is instantaneous, rather that it encourages a slow degradation of financial security that will eventually lead to forced eviction.

There are clear financial implications of the bedroom tax that establish insecurity through the threat of forced eviction as a consequence of spiralling rent arrears. But the story of the bedroom tax and its impact on social tenants is not one of financial hardship and insecurity alone. It is also a story of the dismantling of home for citizens who are already more vulnerable than most. It is a story of precarity seeping into the everyday lived experience of social tenants affected, who are left struggling not only to pay their rent, but struggling to remain in homes that have been adapted to suit their needs, struggling to remain in neighbourhoods that contain family support networks, and struggling to justify their position as social tenants in a socio-political landscape that equates social housing to social blight. The remainder of the chapter explores these impacts by focusing on the experiences of people I met with who had been affected by the bedroom tax.

One participant, Jane, moved into her council-owned flat in north London in the early 1980s. She had previously been renting privately, but decided to move into the at the time more expensive council property as

⁶⁸ Face-to-face interview, 15/10/2014

⁶⁹ The use of DHP as a resistance tactic will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

⁷⁰ In November 2014, I met with Ahmed, a welfare and finance officer at a large national housing association, who told me that his housing association serves an eviction notice after £500 of arrears, and a suspended possession order after £2,000 of arrears has been accrued. This can however be managed with the tenant if they choose to engage with the housing association in the form of weekly or monthly payment plans.

a means of ensuring a more secure and stable future for herself and her two children due to the promise of life-long tenancies available for council-owned homes. She was particularly grateful for the provision of a lifetime secure tenancy, as she has suffered from a severe form of arthritis that has gradually worsened since her twenties, which has left her unable to work full-time for many years. One of her daughters also has cystic fibrosis, a condition that vastly reduces her ability to work due to regular and extended periods spent in hospital. Jane therefore not only lives with a chronic health condition herself, but acts as her daughter's carer. Since April 2013, Jane's four-bedroom flat has been subject to the bedroom tax. According to the Department for Work and Pensions, the box room where she keeps her daughter's medication, wheelchair and other medical equipment is considered 'spare'.

I had initially made contact with Jane when I had posted on a housing association's tenants and residents' association online forum. When I met Jane in a café near her flat, she told me that she had decided to speak to me as she was tired of the bad press social tenants had been subject to in recent years. Initially, our conversation was somewhat stilted and awkward, with Jane appearing reluctant to answer my questions, and visibly balking when I asked her how the bedroom tax had impacted her, asking me defensively whether what I was really asking was how much debt she was in, and that she wasn't willing to share that information with me. It was only after I hastily explained that that was not what I had meant at all, that she was in no way obliged to answer anything I asked her, and that I understood to some extent what she was going through as a family member of mine had been affected by the bedroom tax that she began to warm up to the conversation and share her story with me. Later on in our meeting, she apologised for how she had initially reacted to my questions, explaining that, as a social tenant, she felt that she had to constantly be on the defensive. She commented that she had felt this particularly acutely since the Coalition government had been formed in 2010:

*There was a sense of an instant propaganda campaign when the Coalition came in. There was a marked shift in 2010 in attitudes towards social tenants. They rebranded social housing*⁷¹.

Since this perceived shift in political rhetoric, Jane had become understandably concerned about how other people viewed her, and felt that she was under constant public scrutiny. Jane felt that, as a social tenant in a desirable part of inner London, she is now seen to be sitting on valuable property that she has not earned: that she is understood to be undeserving of her home according to political and media rhetoric:

There's an attitude of 'these people shouldn't be here because it's [her flat] worth too much'...But it's not just bricks and mortar, it's my home! Just because I don't own it, it doesn't mean it's not mine...this [the Coalition] government is fundamentally about disempowerment.

Jane felt that through reducing the home to a site of equity and implementing intrusive policies into the home lives of citizens that do not conform to this ideal had entirely destabilised her sense of having any right to her home. Her comment that just because she doesn't own the property, it doesn't mean it's not hers, highlights the concerning way in which rights to a home are so commonly understood as being synonymous with legal and financial property ownership and equity provision, stripping any sense of autonomy and self-empowerment from those who are not homeowners (Lowe et al 2012; Madden and Marcuse 2016). For Jane, lack of legal ownership did not equate to a lack of ownership full stop. She has lived in her flat for decades; raised her children there, got to know her neighbours and her local area, and adapted her home to suit her needs. The importance of her home in her identity construction and sense of self is no less because she is a social

⁷¹ Face-to-face interview, 16/01/2015.

tenant rather than a homeowner. This is something that is fundamentally ignored by a socio-political narrative that frames social tenancy as an undesirable tenure that should be moved on from, rather than a legitimate form of homemaking in its own right.

Disempowerment and the fear of losing one's home was a common theme in my meetings with social tenants impacted by the bedroom tax. Vas lives in north-west London and, like Jane, has lived in her house for nearly two decades. She lives with a musculoskeletal disorder and as a result is predominately housebound, and needs a walking stick to move around. As a result of her condition, Vas has not worked for many years. Her partner is in employment, working as a part-time handyman, and prior to the bedroom tax they had been managing to pay their rent, albeit with very little income remaining after bills, food, and other essentials had been paid. She is subject to the bedroom tax as one of her adult children has left home. Much like Jane, the policy's implementation has left her in arrears for the first time, and when we met she was concerned about the long-term implications of this.

Vas discussed the sense of disempowerment that she felt in the wake of the policy's implementation. She felt that her housing situation was noticeably worse under the Coalition government. She was particularly keen to raise the subject of Ian Duncan Smith, the then-Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). She referred to the bedroom tax as being:

Ian Duncan Smith's personal agenda...this is the reason the bedroom tax is happening now...They're [the Coalition] trying to push the poor out of London⁷².

⁷² Face-to-face interview, 20/02/2015.

She felt that her local authority had done nothing to help her cope with the extra cost that the bedroom tax had burdened her with, other than to offer her a council property in Slough. Vas has teenage children, and is very reluctant to leave her local area as she feels it will disrupt her children's schooling and leave her alone with no emotional support from the community she has lived in for nearly twenty years. Like Jane, she felt particularly perturbed by the understanding implicit within the policy, that social tenants do not and should not have the same rights to home as owner-occupiers. She noted that:

I made quite a lot of changes to this place over the years to improve it. I paid for that all myself and I get nothing back. And now I'm being charged and told to move to Slough!

Vas had lived in her house for many years and, as is common practice among homeowners, had over the years made alterations to the house in order to improve it, for example replacing the floors and kitchen cabinets (her partner works in construction, and so helped to make a lot of these changes). The work of anthropologists such as Daniel Miller has been integral in examining the intrinsic role of material objects, interior design and aesthetics within the home, and the importance of such materiality in the construction of our identity, and the ways in which we make sense of the world (see for example Miller 2001; 2009; 2013). The home is often understood as a space through which we can assert our autonomy. However, as Burrell notes, domestic autonomy is often dictated by wider social and economic influences: that social and economic forces can *unmake* domestic space as much as we have the power to construct and control it (Burrell 2014, see also Baxter and Brickell 2014). Therefore, unlike if she were a homeowner, the repairs and refurbishment that Vas and her partner have made over the years now only highlight the lack of autonomy they ultimately have over their home. Whilst homeowners might reap the rewards of home improvement, both in terms of aesthetic

pleasure in the homespace, and in terms of financial gains as the value of their property might increase as a consequence, for Vas this work is lost through her tenure status. No matter how she improves or personalises her home, Vas is left fundamentally lacking control in almost every aspect of her housing choices. Her commitment to her home's aesthetics and functionality are ultimately meaningless in a political climate whereby her housing security is being stripped from her.

Vas' experience also embodies the relationship between housing politics, displacement and social cleansing in the capital. The bedroom tax and other housing policies, such as estate regeneration and cuts to Local Housing Allowance rates⁷³, that are clearly targeted at working class communities, work to reframe London as a city that is both unaffordable for low-income Londoners, and a city that is inherently no longer for such communities. Austerity rhetoric has established a narrative of logic in politics and media regarding housing affordability in London: simply, that if you cannot afford to live in the capital, then you should leave (BBC 2010; Slater 2016b). This was certainly Vas and her partner's experience. Her connection to her home and her local area were dismissed, her life and housing circumstances dismissed by her local authority as illogical and an inconvenience: she cannot afford to live in London anymore, so she needs to move to Slough. This in spite of the fact that moving would uproot her from her support networks, her children's school, everything she had known as home for the past two decades. Here, Vas' circumstances are dehumanised: she is seen by her local authority as a problem that needs to be removed, rather than a human being, complete with a life and a home.

⁷³ Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is the name given to housing benefits for private renters. Prior to 2011, LHA rates were capped at the 50th percentile of properties for rent in a local area, essentially meaning that the cheapest 50 per cent of properties in an area would be covered by LHA. However, this changed in 2011, when the cap was reduced to the 30th percentile, meaning that only the cheapest 30 per cent of rental properties in an area would be covered by LHA, with tenants expected to make up the shortfall in rent themselves (Shelter 2015).

Disempowerment and the loss of homemaking capacities has clearly proved to be a severe impact of the bedroom tax for those affected by the policy, with social tenants feeling a new sense of powerlessness and precarity within the homespace due to their status as non-homeowners. The threat of forced eviction has become an ever-looming reality as they face associated struggles such as growing rent arrears, the loss of their homes, and separation from community networks as a consequence (Moffatt et al 2016).

As discussed in Chapter 5, the bedroom tax is constructed as a pragmatic and morally justifiable policy that reduces housing waste by disincentivising people to have unused rooms in their households (Nowicki 2017a). What is left out of these assertions of pragmatism are the integral and intimate ties that people have with their homes. Despite their increased struggles to pay rent, both Vas and Jane insisted that they would not leave their properties. As Jane made clear, the flat is her home: it is where she has lived for two decades. It is where she feels safe, with her friend and family support networks nearby:

I wouldn't consider moving, no. It's not that easy to leave behind...Your whole ability to function depends on your housing.

The bedroom tax has therefore removed social tenants' ability to function without fear of eviction and dispossession infiltrating into their everyday lives. Rhetoric surrounding the bedroom tax has both divorced the concept of housing from understandings of home, and paradoxically uses a moralised construction of the ideal home to dismiss and dismantle the homelives of those who do not frame their relationship with home through market logics (Madden and Marcuse 2016; Nowicki 2017a; 2017b). For many social tenants penalised by the bedroom tax, their homes, once secured through lifetime tenancies and affordable rents, have been placed under threat. Whilst experiences of forced eviction may not be as literal and violent in the way it is for squatters, the spectre of

forced eviction and displacement as an outcome of rent arrears has become a long-term and everyday fixture in their relationship with home. The bedroom tax has instilled a permanent sense of crisis, whereby the home is constantly under threat. As Madden and Marcuse note:

For the oppressed, housing is always in crisis...Housing crisis is a predictable, consistent outcome of a basic characteristic of capitalist spatial development: housing is not produced and distributed for the purposes of dwelling for all; it is produced and distributed as a commodity to enrich the few (2016: 10).

Like section 144, the bedroom tax is a contemporary outcome of a well-established property as equity rhetoric, made all the more fervent by astronomical rises in the value of London's property market in recent years. Those who are understood to be financially, and therefore socially, lacking in value are therefore dismissed as unworthy of living in the capital. This in turn proves beneficial for the wealthy, who capitalise on the displacement of London's poor by investing in the properties or local areas that the poor have been displaced from. The bedroom tax contributes this culture of displacement in London, whereby those on low-incomes living in now-high value parts of the city experience a 'displacement of attrition'. The threat of forced eviction occurs through a reduction in housing income and subsequent rent arrears. This, coupled with the rhetorical implications of the bedroom tax heavily suggests that social tenants should not be living in expensive parts of London. This in turn contributes to a socio-political climate in which low-income Londoners are left struggling to remain in their homes, both on a dwelling and neighbourhood scale.

Impacts of the bedroom tax on those already vulnerable

As in the case of section 144, another, interconnected, way in which domicide is compounded through the homespace is via its impact on social tenants' health and mental wellbeing. A study by Moffatt et al highlighted the multifaceted impacts of the bedroom tax on the wellbeing of those affected. They found that fear of potential re-location, not being able to provide healthy food for themselves or their children, living in inadequately heated homes during the winter, and spiralling rent arrears all contributed to increased anxiety and stress (Moffatt et al 2016). My own findings very much mirrored some of these issues. Participants told me of increased financial concerns either exacerbating existing mental health issues, or leading to them experiencing severe stress and anxiety for the first time as a consequence of the policy.

One of my participants, Annie saw a steep decline in her ability to meet basic needs such as food and heating once she began to lose housing income as a consequence of the bedroom tax. She felt her mental health had deteriorated drastically since the implementation of the policy. She lives alone and receives little support, either financial or emotional. She stated;

I was [previously] paying £173 a month in rent. When they introduced the bedroom tax I was paying £268 and at one time as I had fallen into arrears it was £280. My wages per month are on average £590, so with council tax, gas, electric etc., it doesn't leave much for food or clothes... Last winter I had lots of early nights because I couldn't afford to heat the house and ate lots of toast because it was all I could afford...I can't see a way around the situation I am in ...many people have committed suicide as they just cannot live. I understand why they have done it, this would never be an option for me but it has crossed my mind⁷⁴.

⁷⁴ Online interview, 23/06/2014.

Much like Jane and Vas, Annie told me that prior to the bedroom tax, she had never fallen into rent arrears before. Although she had struggled with her finances in the past, the bedroom tax had left her in a situation not experienced before, whereby she felt that her ability to maintain everyday functions such as feeding herself, heating her home, and retaining a sense of mental wellbeing, had been dismantled by the policy. Although she denied suicidal intent, she acknowledged that the policy had in some instances driven people to taking their own lives, and her own contemplation highlights the devastating severity of the policy on some social tenants' mental wellbeing. By taking away some tenants' ability to afford the most fundamental features of everyday life, such as paying rent, staying warm and feeding oneself, the bedroom tax provides a stark portrayal of an intimate governance practice that establishes and consolidates precarity into the most mundane and crucial aspects of everyday life.

As highlighted in Chapter 2, the bedroom tax disproportionately affects those living with mental and physical disabilities (see Moffatt et al 2016; Wilcox 2014; Webb 2013). The policy therefore encourages the further precarisation of those who are already particularly vulnerable from a public health perspective. Conversations with participants highlighted this. For Jane, being faced with the bedroom tax has meant taking on an unaffordable extra cost in a household where both herself and her teenage daughter suffer from long-term illnesses. The room deemed 'spare' by the DWP provides important storage space for her and her daughter's medical equipment. As people living with a disability, and particularly a physical disability, space for equipment, or extra room to accommodate for conditions that may also affect partners or family members, are vital in the construction and maintenance of a secure, safe and autonomous homespace. As discussed in Chapter 5, the bedroom tax has not only denied these rights to many people, it has actively furthered a rhetoric that suggests that disabled people do not have the same social value as able-bodied people (Mitchell and Snyder 2015): that the extra space disabled people may need to live their lives in comfort and security

is deemed 'spare', and therefore unimportant, in political rhetoric. The bedroom tax is therefore another case in point of people living with disabilities being presented as existing on the margins of what is deemed to be 'normal life' (see Imrie 2014; Edwards and Imrie 2003; Butler and Parr 1999; Gathorne-Hardy 1999; Oliver 1990). The bedroom tax, through its standardised understanding of how a home should be structured and utilised in the everyday (for example bedrooms as spaces for couples or children to sleep in, without consideration that they might have other important uses), dismisses the needs of all those who do not fit into prescribed categories of home and family. Consequently, those such as people living with physical disabilities see a reduction in their home security, and thus experience an increase in stress, anxiety and other mental health conditions.

The bedroom tax also has particularly far-reaching implications for another already socially and politically vulnerable group, single parents. As well as people living with disabilities, the bedroom tax disproportionately impacts single parents, as only the parent with primary custody is allowed to have a bedroom for their children without being penalised by the policy. If a parent without primary custody has a bedroom for their child to stay in when they visit, they are then eligible for their housing benefit to be deducted via the bedroom tax. This inevitably places further strain on domestic relationships already fractured by relationship breakdowns. In 2015, a single father took his local authority to court over their decision that he should be eligible to pay the bedroom tax. He argued that the room was used by his son on a regular basis, and therefore could not be deemed spare. However, the Upper Tribunal rejected his case on the grounds that a person is defined as being responsible for a child if they receive child benefit. As only one parent in a separated family can be eligible for child benefit, the single father was therefore not understood to be legally responsible for his child and therefore eligible to see a reducing in his housing income via the bedroom tax (Coates 2016).

The bedroom tax's dismissal of single parents reflects earlier discussion in Chapter 5 that highlighted the ways in which welfare reform policies were associated with the need to remedy a crisis of 'broken families' brought about by welfare dependency and worklessness (Brown 2015; Wilkinson 2013). The architects of the bedroom tax clearly do not see single parents without custody as legitimate members of a family: therefore, to exempt them from the bedroom tax would be seen as providing help for people framed as incapable of adequate parenting. Single parents, through the rhetoric of Cameron's 'broken families' agenda, are seen as failing norms of domesticity (Turner 2016). Therefore, it is understood through government rhetoric to be morally justifiable that single parents be eligible for the bedroom tax.

Equally, the bedroom tax restricts parents, and single mothers especially, from being able to provide for their children, both financially and emotionally. Both Jane and Vas expressed deep-seated concerns that their mounting debt as a consequence of the policy would mean that they would struggle in the future to feed and clothe their families. The bedroom tax debilitates parents, particularly single parents such as Jane, reducing their ability to provide for their children. This is particularly difficult for women, who continue to be understood in the public, social and political psyche as the main domestic caregivers. A mother's inability to provide financially for her children is commonly part and parcel of the same tropes of welfare dependency as social housing (Wiegers and Chunn 2015). The bedroom tax therefore acts as an extension of the already existing conception of single mothers in receipt of welfare: the lazy 'welfare queens'⁷⁵ who reproduce for the sole purpose of gaining further access to state funds (Pruitt 2016). Therefore, the bedroom tax not only negatively impacts the ability of an already vulnerable group to act as caregivers due to increased financial constraints, it also

⁷⁵ The 'welfare queen' is a trope typically associated with African-American single mothers in receipt of welfare in the USA (Pruitt 2016). However, its connotations that welfare dependency is somehow inherently linked to poor parenting is relevant to the UK context and the bedroom tax.

encourages the further stigmatisation of single parents, and in particular single mothers, living in social housing (and therefore immediately in receipt of welfare in the public psyche) as incapable of providing adequate parenting.

The bedroom tax as an instigator of positive wellbeing?

Whilst for many, positive relationships with home are being eroded by the introduction of the bedroom tax, we must approach with caution overarching assumptions regarding the interactions between the bedroom tax and experiences of home. As highlighted in Chapter 3, the home is an inherently complex and fluid site, that influences, and is influenced by, personal and individual moments and movements in the lifecourse, as well as wider social politics (Baxter and Brickell 2014; Brickell 2012). The amalgamation of all of these varied and constantly shifting factors mean that there must be room for acknowledgement that the bedroom tax does not solely lead to negative, autonomy-stripping experiences. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, which explores the ways in which the bedroom tax has inspired legal activism and the reclamation of rights to home among social tenants. But it should also be noted here that one of my conversations with a participant revealed the bedroom tax to in fact be the instigator of a new, more positive chapter in her home life and mental wellbeing. Although the bedroom tax has undoubtedly had devastating impacts on the lives of many social tenants affected, Maria in fact felt that, for her, the policy has ultimately been a good thing, providing her with the impetus to leave a home that had become a constant and painful reminder of both past tragedies and her current loneliness.

Maria had lived in her three-bedroom council flat in north-west London for forty years before the bedroom tax led her to downsize to a one-bed flat. Over the years, her home had been the backdrop to almost all of

Maria's major life events. Along with her sisters, the flat was where she had played as a young child, and snuck out from as a teenager. She had had her wedding reception in the living room, after which her husband moved in and they started a family. She had raised her child there and taken in many stray family members and friends over the years (including this author). The flat was a central space in her life, a site rife with memories and imbued with feelings of nostalgia and belonging (Blunt and Dowling 2006).

But the flat also carried with it many of the tragedies and struggles Maria had faced throughout her life, serving as a reminder of her intermittently absent father, her dying mother, her difficult marriage and subsequent divorce, and the numerous clashes with her highly rebellious teenage son. Over the years, the flow of friends and relatives moving in and out of the flat began to slow, until Maria was left on her own several years ago. In recent years, Maria's home had come to symbolise her loneliness, the ghosts of its former residents punctuating the emptiness of the flat further.

When the bedroom tax was implemented, Maria initially panicked about her inability to afford the extra housing costs, and felt immensely insecure as a consequence. Maria has been unable to work for the past five years due to the onset of multiple physical and mental illnesses. She was therefore susceptible to the same vulnerabilities as other participants of this research project, whose mental and physical impairments had left them in a particularly precarious position in the face of the bedroom tax. However, unlike any of the other participants that I spoke with, Maria agreed to downsize, and was found a one-bedroom council flat around a mile away from where she lived. Maria seized the opportunity to move, stating;

It [her former flat] had so many memories for me, a lot of them bad. I'd been living alone in there for so long, everything had changed so

*much... [when the opportunity to move arose] I never looked back.
Not once. I've never looked back.*⁷⁶

Maria's story highlights the complex and fluid nature of the home and home unmaking. As Brickell and Baxter have argued, the home is not a static, unchanging site, but one that is in constant flux. Ruptures in the security of the homespace are, therefore, not unilaterally negative in their impact. The unmaking of home can also provide an opportunity to break with memories that haunt a home, with destructive relationships that come to define a home, or with a fearfulness of the unknown that can become embedded within the home (Brickell 2013; Baxter and Brickell 2014).

For Maria, then, the domicidal nature of the bedroom tax in fact enabled her to construct a new homespace free from the ghosts of her past. In this instance, home unmaking became a, somewhat perversely, constructive process. However, it must be noted that an integral component of Maria's relationship with the bedroom tax and the positive outcome that she describes is in no small way a consequence of her being one of the few people affected by the policy who was downsized to social housing stock, and within the same borough that has been her home for all her life (she now lives around a mile or so from her old flat). The bedroom tax has by and large not encouraged people to move house, and there is a lack of social housing stock of the appropriate size to accommodate for the majority of tenants affected even if they should wish to move (Tunstall 2013; Gibb 2015). Maria's case therefore must be understood to be rare and, rather than contradict the devastating impact of the bedroom tax highlighted in various studies of the policy's impact (including this one) (see also Bogue 2016; Moffatt et al 2016; Harris 2014), her experiences in fact highlight the need for greater social housing stock that encourages

⁷⁶ Face to face interview, 12/10/2014.

secure homemaking, autonomy and empowered decision-making in relation to the home.

The appropriation of state support through homeownership

The previous chapter demonstrated the ways in which squatting has been simultaneously derided through the introduction of section 144, and appropriated through the rise of guardianship schemes. Although in a different context, some parallels can be drawn with the relationship between the bedroom tax's introduction and the dismantling of social housing stock more broadly, and the concurrent extension of state supported housing for those seeking to purchase property, particularly in London.

Social housing has for many years now been politically framed as a subsidisation of rent, with market rates depicted as representing the 'true' worth of property. Such rhetorics of subsidy has consistently played an important role in the demonisation of social tenants as social parasites, rather than societal contributors. Such rhetoric was exacerbated in the 2015-2017 Conservative majority government's⁷⁷ first budget, which promised to bring to an end 'subsidised rent' for social tenancy households earning over £30,000 in London (HM Treasury 2015). This clearly forms another layer in the precaritisation of social housing, whereby state support for social housing is explicitly rolled back by the government.

However, in contrast to this consistent denouncement of welfare reliance and promises of a reduction in financial support for social housing, the Coalition (and current Conservative government), at the same time have invested in the subsidisation of several costly homeownership schemes.

⁷⁷ Although the focus of this thesis is the policies implemented by the (Conservative-led) Coalition government, it is also important to incorporate discussion of more recent Conservative government policies where relevant.

These included schemes such as shared ownership, whereby people part-own, part-rent their properties (the rented part of the property being owned by a housing association), and Help to Buy, a scheme that offers would-be homeowners struggling to put down a deposit either an equity loan or mortgage guarantee backed by government funding (Help to Buy, no date). Much like housing benefits and social house building, such schemes provide some measure of state support for housing costs that enable some people to access housing regardless of high market costs. However, homeownership schemes are framed as something different entirely: a means to climb the holy grail that is the property ladder and thus providing a path to independent living, rather than the stagnant state of dependency that social tenancy is so often portrayed as. This is in spite of the fact that both homeownership subsidy schemes and social housing are clearly both forms of state-supported housing. The difference between the two lies in who is being offered the support. Homeownership subsidisation is seen as helping hard-working young professionals tap into the property market, whilst social housing is seen as rewarding the workshy and feckless.

I argue that this is a reappropriation of welfare that acts as something of a Robin Hood in reverse, taking welfare support from the poorest to give to the aspiring middle classes. The concurrent implementation of the bedroom tax and homeownership schemes therefore normalises the precarisation of the home lives of social tenants by once again suggesting that only those who aspire to neoliberal, individualist notions of ownership are deserving of state support. This in turn morally justifies policies such as the bedroom tax by framing them as a necessary means of curbing the 'wrong' kind of state subsidisation. Similarly to the relationship between squatting and property guardianship schemes, the government's response to housing subsidy has been to reappropriate its original purpose, which in the post-war period was at least in part to ensure that the housing needs of the working-classes are satisfactorily met, to centre support on those that are more financially secure and able

to realistically aspire to homeownership. This once again alludes to constructions of who is deserving of home, and who is not: a moralisation of state-support, rather than a policy of state-support based on helping those in greatest need. The final section of this chapter furthers this discussion, arguing that perhaps the most malign impact of the bedroom tax lies in the ways in which it not only perpetrates such constructions of social tenants as undeserving of rights to home, but encourages social tenants *themselves* to subscribe to such tropes.

Socio-symbolic domicile

As with section 144, the domicidal impact of the bedroom tax is perhaps most pertinent and concerning in the long-term when we consider its socio-symbolic aspects. As discussed in this chapter, the bedroom tax has had a detrimental impact on social tenants affected in terms of the precarisation of their homes through the threat of forced eviction and personal financial instability, and by targeting citizens who are already particularly vulnerable, such as people living with both physical and mental disabilities. However, the policy has also arguably had wider social implications, furthering the stigmatisation of social tenants. The bedroom tax serves as a medium through which to further instil and entrench figurations of the social tenant as undeserving and socially parasitical. Indeed, the official title of the policy, the ‘removal of the spare room subsidy’ evokes a sense that the government are taking back a poorly used luxury afforded to undeserving social tenants. The use of the word ‘spare’ encourages an affective response that sees social tenants as selfishly living in subsidised houses with rooms they don’t need at the expense of those who are in need of a larger home. The decision to name the policy the ‘removal of the spare room subsidy’ also highlights a governance strategy that seeks to mask the intimate nature of such a policy. As discussed in Chapter 5, through their naming decision, the Department for Work and Pensions attempted to frame the ‘removal of

the spare room subsidy' as a decision based solely on pragmatism and the justified taking back of undeserved 'spare' space, carefully avoiding any language that pertains to the home (Nowicki 2017b). Such rhetoric therefore furthers a public affectation that frames social tenants as societal parasites, enjoying cheap housing and luxurious quantities of space⁷⁸ at the expense of the hard-working taxpayer.

Such rhetoric has worrying implications for social tenants in terms of their perceived social position. Similarly to the post-section 144 landscape, participants affected by the bedroom tax that I spoke with commented on their feeling a stronger need to present themselves as 'good neighbours' due to the policy's effect on public perceptions of social housing. Tenants appeared more aware than ever before that they are being 'othered', scapegoated as enjoying untold luxuries paid for by the hard-working masses. Jane commented that;

I feel like I constantly need to justify the fact that I live in a council house. I feel like I need to prove myself as a good neighbour so all the homeowners on my street will think 'oh they're [meaning social tenants] alright really'...There's a real sense of 'them and us' that I've never felt before...Recently I was chatting to my neighbour about improvements needed on the street, rubbish collection, street lighting, things like that. He turned to me, very amicably sounding, and said 'but it's not like you pay for it anyway, is it?' That really hit me⁷⁹.

For Jane, the bedroom tax has clear socio-symbolic domicidal implications. The policy has left her with a sense that she must justify her position as a social tenant to her neighbours, a position she had never

⁷⁸ Of course, these 'luxuries' tend only to be perceived as such in the context of social housing; for the homeowner a second bedroom is an often an expectation, rather than a luxury.

⁷⁹ Face to face interview, 16/01/2015

before found herself in. Despite her best efforts to 'prove' herself to the homeowners on her street, Jane's neighbour continued to understand her relationship with home as inferior to his own, assuming that she did not pay council tax as a result of her status as a social tenant, and insinuating that this meant she did not have the same claims to the street and community as himself. The jovial manner in which he relayed his viewpoint, and the fact that he did so directly and unashamedly to Jane herself, highlights that such figurations of the social tenant as socially parasitical have become so deeply normalised in everyday public rhetoric that to voice such opinions, even to a social tenant themselves, is not to confess a hidden prejudice, but rather to speak comfortably of something perceived with no uncertainty to be 'truth' rather than contested opinion. Whilst such negative constructions of social tenants are nothing new, the bedroom tax appears to have contributed to a furthering of this rhetoric. The neighbour that so overtly stigmatised Jane has known her for decades, had always been perfectly friendly to her, and had never made such a comment before. Jane was convinced that the change in attitude (or at least the sudden outward expression of a previously private opinion) of her neighbour was directly linked to the introduction of the bedroom tax:

There is [now] a constant need to justify. Welfare Reform and the bedroom tax makes me feel a sense of shame, a 'them and us' rhetoric... [which brings] a sense of insecurity

Through its language of pragmatism and fairness (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 5), the policy has consolidated the stigmatisation of social tenants as morally justifiable. This has in turn left social tenants like Jane forced to defend their tenure status in an already hostile socio-political climate, whereby social tenants are framed as workshy scroungers (Tyler 2013; Welshman 2013; Crossley and Slater 2014). Whilst previous chapters have highlighted that such tropes of social tenancy are certainly

nothing new, Jane's experience suggests that the stigmatisation of social tenants has become far more acute and publicly acceptable since the introduction of the bedroom tax.

The pressure felt by social tenants to 'prove' that they are deserving of their homespace in the wake of the bedroom tax highlights the ways in which the policy has disrupted social tenant's homemaking capacity through socio-symbolic means. The bedroom tax contributes to and extends assumptions that social tenants are taking what they have not earned at the expense of the hardworking homeowner (or aspiring homeowner). This places social tenants in the position of feeling that they must prove themselves otherwise. Through the bedroom tax, domicide is enacted through a disconnection of the home as something that all humans have the right to, instead being framed as something that people must earn. Jane's experience of the policy speaks of a rhetoric that implies that if you do not own your home, then you do not deserve to be there. This in spite of the fact that she had been living in her home for nearly 30 years. The time spent making a council property home, or making friends and connections in the community, becomes meaningless in the face of a socio-political lens that sees home through a binary lens whereby the only people that have any real claim to home are homeowners (or those aspiring to be homeowners).

The bedroom tax in particular characterises such rhetoric of the undeserving nature of the social tenant in relation to space; implying that the social tenant is taking up too much of it when they have 'done nothing' to earn such purported luxuries as a second bedroom. The bedroom tax is therefore a stark reminder from the Coalition government (and the proceeding Conservative majority and minority governments that have maintained the policy) that social tenants are subject to the whims of governance and political discourse that determines the type of home they are deserving of.

Since her encounter with her neighbour, Jane admitted that she now feels reticent about revealing her tenancy status to others. She remarked, 'I

wouldn't advertise the fact that I'm a council tenant, or that I pay the bedroom tax...I guess the way things are now...I feel ashamed'. For Jane, the framing of social tenants as parasitical has become entrenched to the point that she identifies with such tropes herself, feeling a sense of shame at her status as a social tenant. Caldeira has referred to this behaviour as the 'dilemma of classification' (2001), whereby those that are socially demonised replicate the same language and rhetoric when referring to themselves and/or one another. This has also emerged in other research I have conducted that explores resident experiences of life in high-density housing. I found that those most likely to complain about the social housing elements of new high-density developments, dismissing social tenants as being loud and generally disrespectful of the development, tended to be social tenants themselves (Nowicki et al, in preparation).

This dilemma of classification was also present in relation to squatting, as well as social tenancy. A particularly interesting instance of this self-stigmatisation came about when I told Vas, another participant affected by the bedroom tax, that my research also included work around squatting and its criminalisation. Vas responded by telling me that she herself used to squat in London during the 1990s when she had first moved to the capital as a young woman. Expecting her to be angered by squatting's criminalisation, I proceeded to inform her about section 144 and explain that many squatters I had spoken with felt resentful that they were being depicted so negatively. Vas' response surprised me. Rather than be sympathetic, as I expected, she told me that she felt there was a need for 'responsible squatting' and that a lack of respect among squatters for the properties they were inhabiting was the reason for the practice's criminalisation. She told me that when she had squatted several decades ago, she had ensured that she always paid utility bills and council tax on the property, and commented that many squatters today disrespect and mistreat property; *'they don't treat it as a home,*

*therefore people think badly of them'*⁸⁰. Despite her own squatting history, as well as the current social penalisation she is facing as a social tenant, Vas nonetheless saw the criminalisation of squatting as justifiable and was quick to frame squatters as socially degenerate, despite having once been a squatter herself. Vas' somewhat dismissive response to the current plight of squatters I argue implies that she had internalised the demonising tropes associated with the figure of the squatter and applied them to her own understanding of squatting culture, distancing her own experiences from contemporary rhetoric around squatting as a means of self-preservation in the face of her own continuing stigmatisation as a social tenant.

Jane and Vas' responses to their own social positioning reflects the Foucauldian concept of 'technologies of the self', or self-regulation through particular governance practices. In this context, such structures of governance that are enacted through intimate spaces such as the home work to promote self-classification and self-regulation, and thus self-denigration and the justification of prejudice (see Foucault 1991; Rose; 1999; Field 2003; and Flint 2004). Self-classification is a fundamental means of citizen construction and control, as people who see themselves through the same stigmatising lens as others do provide unequivocal justification for their further denigration. For squatters and social tenants, the implementation of section 144 and the bedroom tax has provided fertile ground for a form of self-classification that sees some conforming to the very same figurations imposed upon them externally by others. This inevitably further compounds their state of precarity. As the deviant, socially parasitical figure is reproduced by squatters and social tenants themselves, the space for an alternative understanding becomes ever smaller, in turn foregrounding the potential for additional domicidal housing policies to be implemented in the future.

Therefore, by reducing social tenants and squatters to crude depictions of deviant societal parasites, both the bedroom tax and section 144 have

⁸⁰ Face to face interview, 20/02/2015

succeeded in entrenching a socio-symbolic form of domicile. Such domicidal structures imply the homelives of those that cannot or will not aspire to neoliberal, individualist framings of what a home should constitute are of less worth than the ideology-abiding masses. These socio-symbolic depictions are yet another layer in the many instances of domicile highlighted within this and the previous chapter that compound to create a condition of hyper-precarity through the homespace, further entrapping squatters and social tenants in a state of perpetual precarity.

Thus far, I have highlighted the multifaceted ways in which squatters and social tenants are impacted by section 144 and the bedroom tax. I have explored the compounded nature of the domicile that occurs as a consequence of the two policies. Firstly, I highlighted forced eviction, and the threat of, as a process that dismantles squatters and social tenants' ability to secure and maintain a homespace. Secondly, I explored the policies' destabilising effect on wellbeing and the ways in which they target those who are already vulnerable. Thirdly, the ways in which both squatting and state-supported housing are reappropriated to fit neoliberal rhetoric were attended to, with a focus on property guardianship in the case of squatting, and Help to Buy schemes in the case of the relationship between welfare and housing. Finally, I examined the ways in which section 144 and the bedroom tax contribute to the further demonisation of squatters and social tenants. These impacts, when layered one over the other, compound squatters and social tenants into a state of continual, permanent precarity, whereby their homemaking capacities are dismantled at every turn (Lewis et al 2015).

However, it would be only telling part of the story without an acknowledgement of the ways in which squatters, social tenants, and sympathetic parties such as charities and some housing association employees, respond to and resist the policies in equally multifaceted ways. The following, and final empirical, chapter will examine the varied means of resistance deployed by these actors. From traditional protests

and rallies, to using housing and welfare bureaucracy to exploit legal and policy loopholes, to social media as a site of grassroots legal activism, the ways in which the policies are challenged have proven to be as multi-layered as their impacts.

Chapter 8

Home in precarious times: evolving activism in the face of housing crisis

This final empirical chapter highlights the varying ways in which both section 144 and the bedroom tax have been, and continue to be, resisted and challenged, both via highly public formats such as protests and other direct action techniques, and in subtler, less publicly visible ways. I argue that the themes of domicile, home unmaking and precarity that have run throughout the thesis culminate here as emblems of not only disempowerment and the dismantling of homemaking capacities in various forms, but also as transformative means of resistance and the recuperation of autonomy. Just as section 144 and the bedroom tax act as destructive governance practices, so too do they incite multifaceted and ingenious acts of resistance. The heightened sense of precarity felt by squatters and social tenants alike has in many instances been subverted through resistive techniques, their precarious housing situations re-deployed as a means of highlighting unfair (and in the case of the bedroom tax, in some instances unlawful) policy and legislative decision-making. Such methods of resistance not only condemn the two policies, but also seek to challenge London's housing crisis more broadly. As previous chapters have highlighted, section 144 and the bedroom tax have incited compounding layers of precarity into the homespaces of squatters and affected multiple aspects of social tenants' lives, framing them within a state of hyper-precarity, whereby they become 'locked in' to a system of governance within which precarity becomes entrenched into the everyday (Lewis et al 2015). Seemingly disparate methods, from public street-based protests and rallies, to developing legal challenges to the policies, to deploying transience and low visibility as a means of escaping unwanted attention, work together to produce modes of resistance as complex and compounding as the policies' impacts

themselves. As this chapter will highlight, it is through this very same hyper-precarious condition that effective resistance is enacted.

Firstly, to note my understanding of the term 'resistance'. Cindi Katz helpfully deconstructs resistance as a terminology, through focusing on three 'modular moments' or aspects (Eizenberg 2013: 8): 'resilience', 'reworking' and 'resistance'. Firstly, resilience refers to practices of survival, people's ability to 'carry on' in the face of social and political oppression. Secondly, reworking is concerned with acknowledging and dealing with issues of oppression and/or injustice through the alteration of life conditions. Katz argues that both resilience and reworking underpin resistance, resistance being defined here by an oppositional consciousness focused on relatively large-scale change (Katz 2004).

The varying methods of resistance outlined in the remainder of this chapter encompass all three modes of resistance outlined by Katz. Each has a different method and agenda: yet, they are innately connected. Each distinct mode of resistance together forms a comprehensive and multi-stranded body of resistance, that combined work to address both specific issues related to an element of section 144 or the bedroom tax, and oppose housing precarity and social injustice more broadly.

Public protest

Public protest in the form of rallies and marches has been utilised as a method of oppositional, conscious resistance at varying points since the advent of the Coalition government's austerity and welfare reform agendas. For anti-bedroom tax campaigners in particular, protesting outside Westminster and other traditional sites of dissent has proved an effective method of ensuring concerns around the policy were placed, and retained, in the public sphere. Large-scale protests, both in London and across the country, were organised, both prior to the policy's implementation, and in the wake of its introduction. Such protests,

several of which I attended between 2013 and 2016, strive to make visible those whose homemaking capacities have been dismantled by the bedroom tax.

In the summer of 2014, I met with Eleanor, a prominent social housing activist and one of the key organisers of many anti-bedroom tax protests and rallies. Eleanor is the national chair of a campaign group that seeks to protect council housing and protest related issues. When we met, campaigning against the bedroom tax formed one of the centrepieces of the groups' protest agenda. Eleanor was explicit during our interview that her resistance tactics involved ensuring that concerns around the bedroom tax remained in the public eye. She saw rallies and protests outside Westminster as key to maintaining levels of public outrage towards the policy. She also saw this form of protest as a means of making visible those who are usually rendered invisible and dismissed in mainstream political rhetoric, in particular those living with disabilities.

Although the work of the campaign group she chairs has a broader scope than that of the bedroom tax alone, namely the protection of council housing, and more recently demands for a government repeal of welfare reform, Eleanor told me that she made a tactical decision to focus much of the group's activities around fighting for a repeal of the bedroom tax:

[We focus on it because] *The bedroom tax is the weakest link in Coalition welfare reform, everyone is against it...* [our campaign] *directly affected Labour's statement against the bedroom tax*⁸¹

Eleanor felt that a focus on the bedroom tax was the best approach in terms of challenging the housing crisis and welfare reform more broadly. She argued that the policy had by far the most widespread unpopularity of all the welfare reform policies, and therefore protests that centred on

⁸¹ Face-to-face interview, 24/07/2014.

the bedroom tax were more likely to garner public and media sympathy and support than other issues such as compulsory council tax contribution. She argued that it was the tireless campaigning of groups such as hers that had led to the Labour Party renouncing the bedroom tax. As has previously been discussed, the bedroom tax has had a hugely disproportionate effect on people with disabilities (around a third of people affected have a disability of some variety) which arguably in part contributes to its unpopularity (Moffatt et al 2015). This is due to people living with physical disabilities in particular often being infantilised in socio-political rhetoric, constructed as tragic, helpless societal figures (Parr and Butler 1999). This disproportionate impact of the bedroom tax on people with disabilities, in particular wheelchair users and those with other physical disabilities, therefore made the precarious situation of affected tenants all the more visible in the public protest setting, as many of the protesters taking part were wheelchair users. Eleanor utilised these growing concerns around the policy's impact in the hope that such protests and subsequent political pressure would incite public sympathy, and not only lead to the repeal of the bedroom tax, but by proxy bring attention to wider related issues pertaining to the housing crisis, such as reductions in social housing stock and social cleansing in London more broadly. The precarious impact of the bedroom tax on the lives of physically disabled people such as wheelchair users has therefore been subverted by activists as a means of making visible the usually invisible crises that have been exacerbated as a consequence of the policy, namely the disproportionate impact of housing policies on groups who are most vulnerable to public spending cuts.

Such public methods of resistance highlight the importance of understanding precarity not only as a politically induced condition of vulnerability and uncertainty, but as a means of subversion, response and resistance to the very systems of power that instigate its prevalence in the first place. Scholars such as Louise Waite (2009) and Chris Philo (2005) have highlighted the importance of mapping out who is responsible for the production of precarity, and using precarity itself as

a means of demanding political change. As Waite (2009: 417) notes; 'The word *precarity* has gained prominence in social movement struggles and seeped into the language of those envisioning alternatives to capitalist existence'. Precarity has become a medium through which activists are able to both express resistance, and connect their struggles with other movements. Under the auspices of neoliberalism, the reduced influence of traditional grassroots support networks such as trade unions, and increased government focus on penalising those not in paid work has incited the need for new motifs of mobilisation and resistance. Precarity therefore becomes a logical framework through which to highlight socio-political injustices. If the public are made aware of the ways in which policies such as the bedroom tax precaritise the homelives of those already vulnerable, then large-scale support for their repeal, in theory at least, becomes more likely.

If precarity as a condition is not defined solely as one related to the labour market, then it is possible to see the potential for its utilisation beyond demands around working conditions, into every other aspect of the everyday lives of marginalised people. Through their use of well-worn sites of protest and dissent such as Westminster, Eleanor and other anti-bedroom tax activists utilise precarity to explicitly and publicly call for the government to shoulder responsibility for the policy's impacts. Through such actions, activists subvert their sense of powerlessness in the face of politically-induced precarity, instead using their very precarity as a means of making as public as possible the domicidal implications of the bedroom tax. This is made particularly pertinent through centring their site of protest on Westminster as a means of explicitly establishing blame on government decision-making for the establishment of social tenants' precarious conditions. Making visible the plight of disabled people by having large gatherings at Westminster consisting of people affected by the bedroom tax also utilises precarity as a means of elucidating to the public who such policies are disproportionately affecting.

Unlike anti-bedroom tax activism, public protest has been used less regularly, or explicitly, in the case of section 144. Public rallies that specifically called for the repeal of section 144 have been few and far between – the most notable occurring in November 2013, when activists set up a week-long ‘occupation camp’ outside of the offices of Conservative MP Mike Freer,⁸² a key proponent in the criminalisation of squatting, in his north London constituency of Finchley and Golders Green (Squat!net 2013; Muir 2013). Similarly to the anti-bedroom tax rallies, the occupation camp made visible the precarity induced by the policy by taking their protest directly to one of the key architects of the law change. Protestors in particular focused on the implications of section 144 on London’s homeless population, holding handmade signs bearing slogans such as ‘homes for all’ and ‘Mike Freer wants you to be homeless’ (Muir 2013). By both ‘moving in’ to the courtyard of Freer’s office, and condemning the MP for his arguable callousness towards the homeless, the anti-section 144 protesters framed the precarious consequences of the law change as one based around domicide. The protestors constructed the homespace as something that has been destroyed by section 144, leaving homeless people exposed and without the capacity for homemaking. This was performed through the act of the protest itself, as demonstrators remained outside in the office courtyard for a week, exposed to the November weather – this explicitly highlighted the domicidal intent behind, and consequences of, section 144, demonstrating through their protest actions that the law change had made more people vulnerable to homelessness. As with the anti-bedroom tax protests described above, the occupation camp, too, subverted the precarious consequences of the law change, making visible their precarity to both publicise its domicidal effects, and demand responsibility from key decision-makers. This form of direct action

⁸² The MP I attempted to contact to discuss his support for section 144, as discussed in Chapter 5.

therefore utilised precarity as a means of exposing legislative injustice, as well as a politically induced condition of vulnerability.

However, unlike the numerous and often highly attended anti-bedroom tax protests, such rallies were much less often undertaken by anti-section 144 campaigners. Rallies, marches, or other forms of public protest that solely demand the repeal of section 144, or that at least prioritised the issue, have been limited. At first glance, this is somewhat unexpected, as squatting communities are commonly associated with being highly politicised and regular fixtures in activism movements. Indeed, nearly all of the squatters I spoke to during my research either were or had been involved in long-term activist movements – primarily Occupy and the Radical Housing Network⁸³. Some of my participants had lived for months in the London Occupy camp outside St Paul's cathedral, whilst others had organised protests hundreds of people strong, for example the October 2014 demonstration at the MIPIM property conference⁸⁴ (Wainwright 2014; Radical Housing Network 2014).

And yet these well-established linkages between squatting communities and protest organisation and participation has not translated directly into public protests that are specifically focused on the repeal of section 144. I argue that this relates back to previous discussion in the thesis around the construction of the squatter as more malign social deviants than social tenants, with squatters regularly portrayed as guileful home thieves. These conceptions are explicitly detached from popular understandings of homelessness through the rhetoric of anti-squatting figureheads such as MP Mike Weatherley, as discussed in Chapter 5. Although social tenants, too, have been demonised as unproductive figures lacking in homeownership aspiration, and thus lacking as

⁸³ The Radical Housing Network is a conglomerate of local housing activist movements in London and beyond.

⁸⁴ Usually held in Cannes, the MIPIM conference is a trade event where property and land investors meet with various clients (including local authorities) seeking to sell assets. In 2014, then-Mayor of London Boris Johnson arranged for MIPIM to be held in London.

citizens, their construction in the case of the bedroom tax has proved more complicated due to the policy's disproportionate emphasis on people with disabilities, and the public and media sympathy that this can elicit. As discussed above, this instils a visible precarity that can be subverted and called upon in public protest settings: the same of which cannot be said for those in opposition to section 144. Although the 'occupation camp' protest outside Freer's office attempted to reconnect squatting to issues of homelessness by framing the demonstration around domicile and home unmaking agendas, ultimately such forms of resistance are, for the meantime at least, small fry in comparison to overarching assumptions around squatting as a practice that it is unrelated to homelessness. This is certainly not to say that such forms of anti-section 144 protest are futile: rather that they should be seen as one element in an assortment of resistance techniques that also attend to the demonised nature of squatting as a practice. As a later section of this chapter will highlight, squatters have had to be particularly ingenious when resisting the policy, moving beyond traditional methods such as public protest and rallying, instead often adopting the methods of resilience and reworking discussed earlier in the chapter.

In contrast, Eleanor was extremely confident that public protest tactics would have an imminent effect on the bedroom tax, stating during our meeting in summer 2014 that:

The bedroom tax is politically dead...I think we'll see the end of the bedroom tax by 2015...it's half dead as we speak.

Unfortunately, her confidence was somewhat misplaced, and at the time of writing the bedroom tax remains very much in place. Although the Labour Party have long stood in opposition to the policy, continuous Conservative-led governments since its implementation has meant that the bedroom tax is yet to be repealed.

Although such forms of resistance are undoubtedly significant in terms of their bringing the impacts of the policies into the public realm via press attention, as isolated methods they appear to be limited in their capacity for success. As the remainder of this chapter will highlight, it is only through utilising various ‘modular moments’ (Eizenberg 2013: 8) of resistance that attest to the varied issues and impacts prevalent within both the bedroom tax and section 144, that the policies can be most successfully challenged.

Using law and policy as tools of resistance

As this thesis has thus far discussed, section 144 and the bedroom tax are instances of law and policy restructuring by the Coalition government that reduce the homemaking capacities of low and no-income Londoners. They incite a spatial injustice that limits where and how squatters and social tenants are able to construct safe and secure housing in London. And yet, just as law and policy are utilised to instil urban spatial injustice, they are concurrently being reworked as modes of resistance by those who seek to challenge section 144 and the bedroom tax. Scholars such as Delaney (2016: 264) have called for legal geographers to investigate ‘the contingencies and constraints of social justice’ in order to better understand the ways in which the law can be utilised as a meaningful contribution to resisting spatial injustice. I argue that these contingencies and constraints have been studied and utilised by social tenants and squatters alike in order to establish a grassroots network that reshape legal and policy barriers into weapons of resistance.

The following section of this chapter focuses on the multifaceted ways in which both the bedroom tax and section 144 are resisted through legal and policy challenges. Unlike more traditional methods of protest and rallying, such forms of resistance utilise and subvert the very same frameworks that seek to dismantle the homemaking capacities of

squatters and social tenants in order to create legally legitimate demand for spatial justice and rights to home. This forms the 'reworking' element of resistance practices outlined by Katz (2004).

Legally challenging the bedroom tax

Resisting and challenging section 144 and the bedroom tax via law and policy has proved to be a prevalent, and at times successful, means of resistance. By framing methods of resistance through the very same mediums by which they have lost their homemaking capacities, squatters and social tenants affected by the bedroom tax further legitimise their challenge to government by using governance structures themselves as a means of resistance. In the case of a group of social tenants taking their cases to the Supreme Court, their challenge has in fact superseded government legislation itself in their argument that the bedroom tax is unlawfully discriminatory against people with disabilities. As highlighted in Chapter 2, since 2014 varying legal challenges to the bedroom tax have taken place. One of the more well-known individual cases is that of the Carmichaels. Jacqueline Carmichael has spina bifida – her husband, Jayson, is her 24-hour carer. The two sleep in separate bedrooms as a consequence of Jacqueline's condition. In spite of this, from April 2013 they became subject to a 14 percent reduction in their housing benefit eligibility as a consequence of the bedroom tax. The couple decided to contest the policy, arguing that the bedroom tax is discriminatory against people with disabilities. At a Tribunal hearing in Liverpool in 2014, a judge ruled that the Carmichaels were entitled to two bedrooms on account of Mrs Carmichael's health condition, that their 14 percent penalty should never have been applied, and that the policy contravened their human rights (Leigh Day 2014; Traynor 2014). Since its implementation, the bedroom tax has been contested in both First-tier and Upper Tier Tribunals on a wide range of grounds: from

discrimination towards people with disabilities, in particular those who need overnight care, specialist equipment storage, or separate rooms from partners; to discrimination against single parents who do not have primary custody of their children; to appeals on the grounds of rooms deemed 'spare bedrooms' being too small or of an inappropriate shape to be considered a bedroom⁸⁵. Legal challenges to the bedroom tax have since risen through the courts, taking place in both the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court (the highest in the UK legal system). In 2014, a group of adults with disabilities, including the Carmichaels, took their concerns further, making a case against the bedroom tax at the Court of Appeal on the grounds that the policy was a curtailment of their human rights. The Court ruled against their case, stating that 'although the under-occupancy rules were discriminatory, for disabled adults the discrimination was justified and therefore lawful' (Leigh Day 2014). However, in January 2016, the Court of Appeal went on to rule in favour of two other parties penalised by the bedroom tax on the grounds that in their cases the policy was unlawful. The policy was challenged by the grandparents of a teenager who needs overnight care, and by a victim of domestic violence whose spare room consists of a panic room to protect her from a violent ex-partner (BBC 2016). A further victory was won in November 2016, when the same group whose case had been rejected by the Court of Appeal won their case in the Supreme Court, as highlighted in Chapter 2. The Supreme Court ruling means that social tenants with similar disabilities that mean partners need to sleep in separate rooms, that act as overnight carers for disabled family members, or social tenants who have panic rooms installed, are now able to challenge the legality of their penalisation through the bedroom tax using the Supreme Court ruling as case-based evidence. The success of these legal challenges therefore highlights the ways in which the law can be utilised as a means of elucidating and challenging spatial injustice. In the case of these high-

85 For an extensive list of both First-tier and Upper Tier Tribunal cases across the UK, see solicitor Giles Peaker's *Nearly Legal* blog: <http://nearlylegal.co.uk/bedroom-tax-fft-decisions/>

profile legal cases, their challenges to the bedroom tax focused on the ways in which the policy discriminates against people living with disabilities, or those protecting themselves from domestic violence, asking the courts to redraw understandings of the 'spare bedroom' in many instances as a necessary space for the assurance of wellbeing and safety for individuals for a multitude of reasons beyond sleep. The challenges brought to the fore the ways in which government often discriminates against disabled bodies, and particularly the ways in which policies such as the bedroom tax discount the spatial and architectural needs of those who are marginalised by a political discourse that understands homemaking through the lens of able-bodied needs only (Edwards and Imrie 2003; Imrie 2014).

Resisting the bedroom tax through law and social media

Reworking the law, from a barrier to an aid, has been utilised as a means of challenging the bedroom tax not only through the high-profile cases discussed above. A prominent method of resisting precarity in the everyday also lies in the use of social media, in particular Facebook groups that provide support and information for those affected by the bedroom tax and other areas of welfare reform. Rather than solely spaces within which to share grievances around the impact of the bedroom tax, some groups actively encourage resistance to the policy through these mediums. People who join the Facebook groups post details of their specific circumstances, and ask other members for advice regarding how they might appeal their local authority's decision to implement the bedroom tax. For example, many people often post queries relating to the size and shapes of their rooms, looking for advice on whether they are able to launch an appeal on the basis that what their local authority has deemed a 'spare bedroom' is in fact too small to be classed as a bedroom at all. Other members of the group then post previous disputes that

claimants have won on the basis of this in order to help members build their own case, as the pinned post for one group highlights:

What size is the room? Is it under 65.81 square feet. after deducting unusable floor space - for door opening, radiators, boxing, stairwell etc.? Can you easily fit a bed and basic bedroom furniture in there? Is there a boiler in the room? Are there any safety issues with it being used to sleep in? What about the shape? Is there a sloping ceiling? Would the bed be too near, or obstructing, the radiator?

The room should be capable of accommodating a single adult bed, a bedside table and somewhere to store clothes (see paragraph 33 of Nelson), as well as providing space for dressing and undressing. Nelson/Fife is in our files.

(SSWP v David Nelson and Fife Council, SSWP v James Nelson and Fife Council [2014] UKUT 0525 (AAC)

It needs to have an absolute minimum floor space of 6.114 square metres or 65.81 square feet.

If appealing on room size, use the appeal letter for this year's decision - 'APPEAL LETTER 2016 ' in our files. Use the appeal letter (copy and paste) then once you've filled this in you need to print it off and sign it and hand it in to your local council (NOT your landlord, but your local council). Get a receipt for it, or, if posting, post by recorded delivery, and keep a copy⁸⁶.

Using amalgamated knowledge of tribunal decisions around bedroom tax appeal cases, group members encourage one another to take action and appeal local authority decisions. Here, an everyday method of communication is utilised to access legal domains that many social tenants would in most circumstances be excluded from due to the court room as a site of resistance and social justice often being confined to those who have economic and social access to them. Social media in this instance replaces the courtroom as an attainable site through which resistance to the bedroom tax can be sought and rights to home re-established.

Such methods constitute a form of active citizenship that sees citizens affected by the bedroom tax collaboratively shaping their rights through

⁸⁶ Page last accessed 28/06/2017.

shared knowledge and experience (Onyx et al 2012). Through grassroots-level legal organisation, social tenants affected by the bedroom tax are able to build the legal knowledge and skills to challenge the bedroom tax on a case-by-case basis. This is an example of active citizenship that Touraine defines as citizens demanding agency: the emergence of actors that demand to be recognised as 'subjects' in their own right, rather than reduced to passive 'subjects of the state' (Touraine 2000). In this instance, social media acts as a particularly useful means of establishing such forms of active citizenship, particularly among communities who are disproportionately living with physical disabilities, as it is largely accessible, and participants are less likely to be limited by social, economic and mobility constraints than other traditional forms of protest that require large gatherings in particular spaces, such as central London, which may prove problematic to reach for many affected by the bedroom tax.

The phenomena of social media as a key contemporary site of resistance and dissent has garnered particular interest from academics in recent years, particularly in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring and the global Occupy movement of the same year, where activists appropriated corporate communication services, most notably Facebook and Twitter, to organise and publicise mass protests and acts of dissent (Gerbaudo 2012). The impact of social media as a medium of protest has been significant, both in terms of the appropriation of public space that it enabled in countries where public protests are often brutally curtailed, as in the case of the Arab Spring, and in its reframing of social media as a valid and powerful political tool. Indeed, social media is often in part attributed to the overthrowing of dictators across Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Libya during the Arab Spring period (Khondker 2011; Tudoroiu 2014). More recently in the UK, the Labour campaign group Momentum's use of social media has been accredited with the rise in young people voting in the June 2017 election (Cosslett 2017).

Whilst social media responses to the bedroom tax are clearly vastly different to the example of its usage during the Arab Spring in terms of political context and intended outcomes, Facebook nonetheless provides an integral means of resistance to the social and spatial exclusion of people affected by the policy. Social media in this context provides a means of connecting people who are often excluded from both traditional spaces of public protest and from the legal sphere: sites often demarcated by socio-political barriers such as gender, race and economic and educational attainment. Members of the group encourage fellow social tenants affected to take an active role in fighting back against the bedroom tax, helping them to make legal challenges to the policy by disseminating information regarding previous appeal wins. As the pinned post for one support group states:

Our aim is to help you appeal the bedroom tax and gain exemption from it. There are thousands of tenants who are now bedroom tax free, due to doing just that....

Please also read other members' appeal wins which are in our files. Just scroll down them for lots of useful information, including applying for DHP's (Discretionary Housing Payment) to help with paying the bedroom tax. Remember, though, DHP's are just temporary and will probably not be available to all in the near future. Appealing the bedroom tax and gaining exemption from it, is Permanent. (no date, emphasis my own⁸⁷).

This emphasis on both a long-term solution to the bedroom tax on an individual scale, and the encouragement of utilising legal knowledge gathered collectively by members of the group, enables both a grassroots autonomy, and a sustainable form of resistance. The continual challenging and dismantling of the law that underpins the bedroom tax has the potential to eventually entirely erode the legal legitimacy of the policy.

⁸⁷ Page last accessed 28/06/2017.

For people affected by the bedroom tax, social media support groups provide ways in which to connect and construct networks of community-based activism. They are also an important means of circumventing socio-economic geographic barriers that may otherwise have inhibited them from organising. Social tenants who may not have otherwise been able to become involved in organised resistance due to disability or low incomes restricting their mobility are enabled and empowered by the construction of a network that has formed on the basis of a shared struggle and a desire to combat the domicidal policies enacted upon them. Mobilities scholarship has identified sociality and community identity as being produced through networks of people and ideas that cannot necessarily be ascribed to living in close geographical proximity (see Cresswell 2010): this, too can be said of immobility (or reduced mobility) and exclusion from traditional spaces of resistance such as the street or public square. For those who are unable to, or decide not to, engage in more publicly performative forms of resistance, such communities that are unbound by spatial fixity become key sites through which to challenge enactments of domicile and reclaim their rights to home. Such social media groups also work to de-mythologise and reframe the legal spaces of the city from spaces of intimidation to spaces of emancipation. This is achieved through encouraging members to appeal the bedroom tax and thus enter the court system. First-tier or Upper tribunal appeals are dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and are much smaller in scale than the recent Supreme Court hearing in terms of their potential for immediate and widespread change in regards to the policy. They are nonetheless crucial spaces through which social tenants can potentially regain autonomy over their own homes, and pave the way for new forms of home (re)making for others in the future.

For the members of the bedroom tax support groups, social media is constructed as a space within which experiences of precarity and home unmaking can be collectivised and repurposed within legal frameworks. Through the communication of shared experiences, social tenants are asserting both autonomy and a long-term strategy for home (re)making

in the aftermath of domicile. Unlike the protests outside Parliament highlighted earlier in the chapter, the Facebook groups do not evoke the spectacle of resistance in terms of media coverage or highly visible challenges to the bedroom tax: rather, they entrench resistance into the everyday experience of living with the policy by normalising social tenants' understanding that they have both the legal right and resources to challenge it. By utilising an everyday space such as a social media site to encourage resistance and reworking of the law, group members consequently open up the legal space of the courtroom as a potential site of revolt and pave the way for others who have been affected by the bedroom tax to do the same.

The collective action demonstrated by these groups functions much in the way as a workers' union might, with those directly impacted by injustice collectivising their legal rights and knowledge to assert resistance and change. However, unlike traditional unions, the Facebook support groups are not centred on a particular workplace or industry, but rather are structured around the particular form of social injustice itself. Here, collective action has been instigated due to the precaritisation of the everyday lives and homespaces of a particular, yet socially demographically and geographically disparate group. Although people with disabilities are disproportionately likely to be impacted by the bedroom tax, these social media sites do not exist solely to support and represent disabled people. Rather, their existence is based exclusively upon the existence of the bedroom tax and the precarity that it has inflicted upon hundreds of thousands of lives. In this instance, grassroots unionisation has therefore been borne directly from precarity itself. Above all else, the experience of precarity, and a desire to resist it, has foregrounded this subtle, largely unnoticed, and yet powerful activist movement. The bedroom tax has created a large cohort of people who may otherwise have remained disparate from one another, and connected them via the shared precarity that has been embedded into their homelives. For these social media activists, then, precarity serves a dualistic purpose, instigating resistance and change, as well as

uncertainty and destruction (Waite 2009). The bedroom tax has not merely rendered the homespace a site of precarity waylaid with the fear of eviction and/or indebtedness: rather it has encouraged social tenants affected to refigure their homes as sites from which to connect with one another and challenge the legal viability of the policy.

Stakeholder resistance through policy implementation: the bedroom tax, Discretionary Housing Payments and legal loopholes

Another key mode of resistance to the bedroom tax that is formulated and enacted through policy is the utilisation of Discretionary Housing Payments and alternative measures of welfare support to housing benefit for affected social tenants. This incarnation of resistance can be understood through Katz's (2004) framework as 'resilience': a practice of survival, and the creation of refuge (Eizenberg 2013) from the damage eked out by both section 144 and the bedroom tax. This form of policy-oriented resistance has been utilised by multiple stakeholders enlisted in mitigating the effects of the bedroom tax: namely the employees of housing associations and housing and welfare-related charities. As was briefly discussed in Chapter 2, housing associations and third sector organisations often use existing funding structures, in particular Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)⁸⁸, as a means of mitigating the impacts of the bedroom tax on their tenants. Whilst resistance to displacement from the perspective of residents is unquestionably of great importance, the tactics deployed by organisations that are often vulnerable to the same crises of cuts to funding and government dismissal, such as voluntary or public sector organisations, remains underexplored in research on urban displacement (DeVerteuil 2012).

⁸⁸ As explained in more detail in Chapter 2, DHP is a source of funding allocated by central government to local authorities to assist tenants struggling with rent payments and other housing issues on a temporary and discretionary basis.

Throughout my research, I found that such organisations themselves faced precarious outcomes as a consequence of the bedroom tax, particularly for housing associations through a loss of income from residents. They are therefore intrinsically bound into the precarisation experienced by social tenants themselves, and as a consequence have developed their own methods of combatting the policy. Employees of housing associations and charities that I interviewed often talked of the varying ways in which they tried to offset the worst effects of the bedroom tax on their residents or clients. One participant, Molly, the welfare officer for a small housing association managing properties predominately in a borough in east London with high levels of deprivation, told me during our interview that her housing association had not yet evicted anyone as a consequence of the bedroom tax. She felt that the housing association had:

...managed to control the impact of the bedroom tax. We do home visits for all those affected...some people are coping a lot more than others...we try to help people save money in other areas, such as food, energy bills and council tax...[but]for us, DHP is the main coping strategy⁸⁹

Although housing associations and charities often aided social tenants affected by the bedroom tax through working with them to attempt to help them save money in other areas of their lives, DHP was cited as the most commonplace and effective means of reducing the impact of the policy in the short-to-medium term. For Ahmed, the welfare and finance officer for a large housing association based in west London, re-routing DHP funding, previously used mainly for private tenants rather than those in the social rented sector, was an essential means of ensuring as little impact as possible for those affected by the bedroom tax. At the time of our interview in late 2014, Ahmed's department were dealing with

⁸⁹Face to face interview, 19/12/2014.

around 550 bedroom tax cases, with DHP at the core of the support they were able to offer:

DHP has definitely skewed the impact of the bedroom tax...it helps us offer enhanced support rather than having to take tenants to court [over arrears] ... [for example] [name of north-west London council] provided a blanket DHP payment for bedroom tax tenants at the end of the financial year [2013/14] ...and [name of north London council] have devolved DHP decisions to [name of housing association]⁹⁰

For Nick, a welfare and debt adviser for a UK debt charity, DHP also provided a vital source of relief for clients affected by the bedroom tax. He helped clients apply to their local authority for DHP funding, as well as looking into whether they were eligible for further tax credits or higher levels of Employment Support Allowance (ESA) in order to make up some of the income lost through the bedroom tax. He remarked:

For most clients, seeking work is not an option...people are seeking higher level disability benefits to avoid the bedroom tax, people are going overseas, people are claiming relationships are ending...⁹¹

Ironically, public sector workers have used particular central government policies to mitigate the effects of others, combatting the loss of income in one area by attempting to extract more money from another. Similarly to the example of the Facebook support groups, this is an example of grassroots active citizenship that utilises legal and policy knowledge to subvert and challenge the bedroom tax: using a similar method utilised by the perpetrators of the bedroom tax in order to circumvent it.

⁹⁰Face to face interview, 28/11/2014.

⁹¹Face to face interview, 15/12/2014.

This was also evident in the emergence of a legal loophole which housing associations and charities then utilised in order to help clients claim back income lost through the bedroom tax. 4(1)(a) of Schedule 3 of the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (Consequential Provisions) Regulations 2006 effectively exempted tenants who have been continuously in receipt of housing benefit at the same address since 1 January 1996 and before from the bedroom tax was implemented (Department for Work and Pensions 2014a; Wilson 2016). This again enabled those employed in housing associations, charities and other key members of the housing support sector to utilise government legislation itself as a means of reducing the impact of the bedroom tax. Indeed, Ahmed informed me that at least 30 of the households affected within the housing association he worked for had been made exempt from the bedroom tax as a consequence of the loophole⁹². Until the closure of the loophole by the DWP in 2014, Ahmed had found this method a highly successful way of using legal knowledge as a means of counteracting the bedroom tax.

The support of some housing associations and welfare-focused charities in mitigating the impact of the bedroom tax has proved invaluable in two key ways. Firstly, the legislative and policy expertise of such stakeholders has meant that means of resistance can be identified from within the realms of policy and law in and of themselves. Secondly, such a response helps to frame resistance to the bedroom tax as legitimate in the public eye. If professionals in the field of housing are damning of the policy and working to ensure a reduction in its impact, the bedroom tax therefore becomes structured as inherently problematic within wider mediums of critique, most notably in the left-wing media (see for example Cooper 2013; Foster 2013). Housing association and housing charity employees such as Ahmed, Molly and Nick, referred to the

⁹² This loophole was later closed by the Department for Work and Pensions in March 2014 following the introduction of The Housing Benefit (Transitional Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (Department for Work and Pensions 2014b).

bedroom tax during conversation with me as a decision based on the ideologies of the Conservative Party, rather than as an economic solution to national deficit. There was clear concern among all those I interviewed working in the housing sector that the bedroom tax was a harmful policy, and that mitigating its effects as much as possible was an important task.

However, whilst such support and commitment to mitigating the policy's harm and enabling people to remain in their homes with a reduced fear of eviction and/or indebtedness is both commendable and necessary, such methods can also be in danger of further compounding the precarity of social tenants affected by the bedroom tax. This is due to the fact that top-down resistance techniques may ultimately lack the ability to enable agency on the part of the social tenant. The reliance of housing associations and third sector organisations on utilising DHP in particular is potentially problematic in two key ways. Firstly, such methods that rely on the resilience of government and charitable institutions, if used in isolation from other techniques, potentially infantilise social tenants as incapable of constructing their own resistive tools. The fact that people affected by the bedroom tax are disproportionately likely to have a disability only exacerbates such perceptions of helplessness in the face of cuts to welfare, and in some senses does little to mitigate tenants' precarious conditions in the long term. As scholars in the field of geographies of disability have noted, disabled people are commonly figured as tragic characters, 'failing to meet normal standards of form, mobility and ability' (Parr and Butler 1999: 3), constructed via a spatial logic that separates people both corporeally and psychologically, on the basis of their disability (see Imrie 2014; Edwards and Imrie 2008; Imrie and Edwards 2007). Therefore, modes of resistance that are essentially top-down in their construction, no matter how well-meaning, are ultimately limited in their ability to challenge the bedroom tax beyond the immediate and short-term impacts of the policy. It is the resistance movements of social tenants affected by the bedroom tax themselves that are tantamount not only to overhauling the policy itself, but challenging both normalised assumptions of disability and the spatial exclusion of

disabled people and social tenants from narratives of autonomy and resistance in the longer term. Secondly, the DHP method in particular threatens to be overly reliant on resilience as a technique, rather than truly challenging the governance structures that have established such domicidal policies in the first place. As highlighted previously in Chapter 2, DHP funding allocation is also being cut, stripping social tenants and housing associations of yet another means of resistance and survival. Using the ultimately temporary method of DHP funding as a predominant source of resistance to and mitigation from the bedroom tax is therefore highly complex. An over-reliance on a temporary measure may in fact exacerbate the precarious conditions faced by affected social tenants. By encouraging resistance within such frameworks, housing associations and charities may ultimately consolidate social tenancy within normalised understandings of social tenants as inherently precarious within Coalition and Conservative government agendas.

Legally challenging section 144

Squatters have long utilised the law as a means of challenging anti-squatting legislation, and as a space through which to fight for their autonomy and rights to home (Finchett-Maddock 2014). As discussed in previous chapters, squatting's legal position has always been precarious, even before its partial illegalisation in 2012. This somewhat permanent state of precarity in large part encouraged the formation during the 1960s and 1970s of long-standing resistance and advisory groups such as the Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS) and the London Squatters Campaign, who have framed their advice and support of squatters around ensuring the community has a strong legal knowledge. For example, the 1977 Criminal Law Act (outlined in Chapter 2) left many people at the time unsure as to whether squatting had been made illegal. ASS responded to the law by launching the Squatting is Still Legal

campaign in 1978 to reassure squatters that squatting remained a civil, rather than criminal, offence. The 1977 law change also encouraged amnesty between the Greater London Council (GLC) and squatter groups, with the GLC making the decision to legalise 1,850 squats as licensed squats, rather than deal with the mass eviction, and subsequent rehousing, of thousands of squatters (Finchett-Maddock 2014).

In his vitriolic anti-squatting speech in 2011, MP Mike Weatherley denounced squatters for ‘running rings around the law’, and indeed, it can be argued that there is some truth to this (Weatherley 2011b). Due to their continually precarious state, squatters often have high levels of legal knowledge, which they utilise to protect their homes, and the homes of fellow squatters. In his account of London’s squatting movement in the 1960s and 70s, Ron Bailey recalled an incident where a group of squatters used their legal expertise to trick the police, and thus save themselves from eviction. They complied with a possession order on a squatted building by moving one family out and moving another in. This meant that when the police came to evict the squatters, they found they could no longer do so as the possession order was against a family that had already left (Bailey 1973). Such tactics highlight the longstanding relationship between squatting and the law, with the law acting as both a barrier to squatting, and a means through which to resist eviction and displacement.

More recently, the Squatters’ Action for Secure Homes (SQUASH) was formed in 2011 as a means of understanding and responding to the impending potential law change. The group consists of legal scholars, social scientists and activists. One of my participants, Roberta, is a key member of SQUASH. When we met in summer 2014, she told me about SQUASH’s attempts to challenge the legal, social and economic viability of section 144 in the aftermath of its implementation. She told me that, on the basis that no impact assessment had been conducted by the government itself, the campaign group in March 2013, endorsed by academics (Danny Dorling, Alex Vasudevan and Kesia Reeve), MP John

McDonnell (now Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer) and Liberal Democrat Baroness Miller, developed their own impact assessment six months after section 144's implementation. The report, *The Case Against Section 144*, condemned the legislation on four key policy and legally-framed grounds. Firstly, they argued that the law was undemocratic, and thus legally dubious. This was due to the overly short parliamentary process leaving little time for scrutiny before the section 144 amendment to the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act was passed. Secondly, the report suggested that the law change was unjust as it would disproportionately impact homeless people, and place undue additional pressure on local authorities already struggling to supply housing to their most vulnerable residents. Thirdly, SQUASH highlighted the adequacy of prior legislation, in particular the Criminal Law Act 1977, in protecting tenants and homeowners and restricting squatting, raising questions as to the necessity of the law change. They asserted that section 144 was implemented for ideological, rather than legal, purposes. Finally, the report suggests that section 144 is unaffordable, citing direct (evictions, arrests and prosecutions) and indirect (increased welfare expenditure, particularly in relation to housing benefit) costs that the law change will incite, thus highlighting that the law is at direct odds with austerity-centric policymaking agendas (SQUASH 2013). Alongside this, squatter groups such as Grow Heathrow continue to appeal eviction notices through the courts, using Section 8 of the Human Rights Act (the right to private and family life) as a means of challenging ongoing legal threats to evict them. In the context of a homemaking practice that is under constant legal penalisation, squatters have therefore had little choice but to repurpose the law as a means of asserting their rights to live autonomously in the city (Finchett-Maddock 2014). This can take the form of organised advisory and activist groups such as ASS and SQUASH, or in the form of more specific resistances to eviction.

Tariq, a squatter participant, informed me of a particularly interesting and ad hoc use of the law as a resistive tool. He told me that a squatter

acquaintance of his had been making a concerted effort to get himself arrested under section 144, in order to see how effective and used in practice the law change is. He did this, I was told⁹³, by squatting exclusively in residential buildings, and making his presence known as much as possible to police. Tariq told me that his acquaintance had found that he was very rarely arrested under section 144, instead being arrested for trespass or breaking and entering; and that these charges were generally dropped before they reached court. Therefore, through utilising the very legal medium that has rendered squatting partially illegal, the squatter was able to highlight the limited capabilities of section 144 in practice.

To return to critical geographies of home, in a legal landscape whereby homemaking capacities have been greatly dismantled for squatters, the law acts as a crucial tool for protecting both individual squats, and more broadly squatters' rights to secure and maintain homes. The purposeful arrest techniques used by Tariq's friend utilises the law itself to highlight its incompetence and impracticality. This method takes the unravelling of home (or home unmaking) and turns it on its head, revealing section 144 to be an impractical and in some ways unthreatening law. He chose to do this in spite of the risks of imprisonment and fining that have discouraged others from squatting in residential buildings in the aftermath of section 144. This is a resistive method whereby the squatter actively encouraged home unmaking through eviction and arrest in an attempt to better secure the homelives of squatters in the future by proving the failures of the police to implement the law change. This reflects Fernandez's call for better attention to be paid to the linkages between homemaking and unmaking (Fernandez 2014). This example

⁹³ I had arranged to meet with the squatter in person, but was later told that he had decided to leave the UK 'indefinitely', and has not been in contact with Tariq or his crew since. Unfortunately, this meant that I did not manage to meet him for an interview, and Tariq's accounts remain my best source on this resistance technique. Despite this, I felt that it was too significant a resistance method to not include in this chapter.

highlights the intrinsic connection between the two, and the ways in which such a connection can be utilised for resistive purposes.

In all of the instances described above, social tenants, squatters and other stakeholders have employed resistance techniques constructed around policymaking and the law itself. Such utilisation of the very structures that have seen their discrimination and the destruction of their homemaking capacities works to legitimise resistance to the policies via their enactment within legal and social policy frameworks. This once again reveals the transformative potential of both section 144 and the bedroom tax. The characteristics that embed precarity and instigate compounded forms of domicile are utilised by activists in order to build a challenge to the policies.

Resisting section 144 through transience and invisibility

This chapter has thus far highlighted the varying ways in which social tenants and squatters seek to resist the bedroom tax and section 144 via public protest and rallying methods, and through the subversion and reconstruction of law and policy. However, a clear difference in public attitudes towards the bedroom tax compared with squatting has meant that squatters have been forced to use a wider, and often covert, array of resistive tools, often with a focus on reworking the practice of squatting in order to ensure its survival.

As Roberta noted when we met, squatters are finding it increasingly difficult to garner public sympathy, and there is little political appetite, even from the left, to challenge section 144. In the months immediately before and after the implementation of the law change, she had, as part of the campaign group SQUASH, made repeated attempts to gain the support of major national housing charities, but felt that it had been to little avail. She said that:

Labour and [name of housing charity] will only touch the topic of squatting in relation to desperation and street homelessness⁹⁴.

Unlike the bedroom tax, which has garnered public concern from both the political left and housing and homelessness charities, section 144 has remained somewhat unchallenged. In part as a consequence of this, squatters have therefore been forced to adopt somewhat unusual methods of resistance to section 144 in order to maintain their rights to home. This has by and large consisted of making use of the transience and precarity squatters experience on a day-to-day basis, and subverting it to use these same markers of precarity as tools of resistance and survival in the urban fabric. The following section of this chapter will explore these methods in more detail in relation to two key methods: the subversion of transience, and hiding in plain sight.

Transience

For squatters struggling to retain their ability to establish and maintain a homespace in the post-section 144 landscape, transience and invisibility, rather than public protest, have become some of the key features of resistance. This is aided by the transience and precarity intrinsic within squatting as a practice. The very nature of contemporary squatting in London as a form of homemaking means that squatters are constantly experiencing home unmaking and remaking as they move from one building to the next. This inherent transience therefore makes it difficult for law enforcement to ever fully dismantle the practice, no matter how precarious squatters' positions within the urban social fabric may be. As mentioned in Chapter 6, one crew I spoke with had moved five times in the space of a month due in part to section 144 encouraging a crackdown on squatting in commercial as well as residential

⁹⁴ Face-to-face interview, 08/07/2014.

properties. Other participants also highlighted the transience of post-section 144 squatting in particular. Ray told me that he had lived in four or five squats in quick succession in London, with the average time staying in one place being just a few weeks. By contrast Grace, living in a former post office in south London in October 2014, had come to an agreement with the property's owner that she could stay until January 2015, a situation currently 'unheard of'. This highlights that the precariousness of squatters' homelives has become so embedded that the idea of being able to remain in one squat for three months was deemed unusually long-term.

Such embedded precarity and the constant dismantling of the home space is undeniably difficult for squatters, both practically in terms of finding the next squat, and emotionally in terms of their mental wellbeing and sense of stability. However, I argue that it is this very same precarity and transience that has enabled squatting to continue as a form of homemaking in such hostile conditions. By being permanently fleeting, home can be continually remade, as well as unmade (Baxter and Brickell 2014). For the police and the courts, such transience must be akin to trying to catch running water with your hands. The implementation of a law criminalising squatting therefore in some respects only makes the practice more transient, and thus harder to eradicate, as squatters move on from one homespace to the next with ever-increasing speed. At a seminar I attended in February 2016 one of the speakers, a former squatter himself, said of the practice: *'squatting will always happen as long as people need a place to call home'*. This statement encapsulates a contradictory yet fundamental aspect of squatting: that the harder section 144 and other housing policies make it for low-income people to exist in the city, the more necessary squatting becomes as a means of retaining the presence of subversion and resistance to displacement in urban environments. Its intrinsic relationship with precarity means that the more punishing the anti-squatting agenda, the more inventive, and thus harder to police, squatting will become (Vasudevan 2015a).

Invisibility: hiding in plain sight

Squatters also subvert their precarity by reframing it as a means of resistance through methods that require 'hiding in plain sight'. Remaining undetected can prove difficult for squatters in the post-criminalisation landscape, as the vast majority of squatters now live in commercial, rather than residential, properties. This immediately makes their presence more visible. This is in large part due the fact that the law change has meant that squatted commercial properties tend to consist of larger crews that are inevitably more obvious. As commercial buildings are not ordinarily associated with having residents, any activity that indicates people are living in a commercial property also makes squatting crews more visible, and therefore as a consequence more vulnerable.

A crew I visited that were squatting a former pub in south London had combatted their increased visibility, and thus potentially the longevity of their home, in a particularly ingenious way. Rather than trying to make the property look empty, the crew instead repurposed its visibility by masking the building's usage as something other than a home, therefore protecting themselves from eviction. As Tariq, one of the crew members, showed me when I met him outside the squat, he and some of the other members had made and mounted a sign over the doorway that consisted of a picture of a bike and the wording 'Bike Curious'. Tariq told me, somewhat gleefully, that:

We're pretending that we're running a business...and the nature of the fake business fits into gentrifier and hipster aesthetic!⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Face to face interview, 16/07/2015.



Figure 6: Advertisement for 'Bike Curious'. Source: <https://twitter.com/astrotomato/status/654196187940167680/photo/1>

Indeed, the intentions of the fake shop front were successful as far as I was concerned - the sign had confused me until Tariq had come out to meet me, as I thought I was in the wrong place for the interview. Interestingly, the crew were employing gentrification tropes and reappropriating them to protect their home, and they believed that in part as a consequence of this the squat had received very little unwanted interest from the local population or police. By making their homespace invisible through connecting the squat with hipster and gentrification aesthetics (for a more detailed discussion of the aesthetics of gentrification, see Ley 2003; Harris 2012) – the road-bike being emblematic of hipsterism - Tariq and his crew had utilised the very same socio-political structures that have led to the displacement (or threatened displacement) of many of inner London's low-income residents in order to construct and maintain a homespace for themselves. This provides an interesting contrast with Dave's concerns in Chapter 6 that the appropriation of squatter aesthetics into gentrification marketing could potentially contribute to its downfall. Rather, the crew had subverted such aesthetics in order to disguise

themselves as a hipster trope, and thus avoid detection from locals or the police.

Rather than fearing the increased precarity that inevitably rose from their unavoidable visibility, Tariq and his crew chose instead to subvert their precarious condition by hiding in plain sight. Their precarious position therefore became the means of their continued existence, and thus reworking, and ultimately resistance, of anti-squatting legislation. The crew's method mimicked now common imaginings of inner London, whereby gentrification has brought about the displacement of many residents, and hipster aesthetics, often ironically drawn from squatter culture and style, and have decimated and commercialised many of the cultural practices they have been inspired by. By engaging with and appropriating some of the very socio-political conditions that have contributed to the increased precarisation of squatters and other low-income groups, the crew were ultimately able to protect themselves from the threat of forced eviction.

As Vasudevan notes, squatting 'points to the possibilities – complex, makeshift and experimental – for extending, improving and sustaining life in settings of pervasive marginality' (2015a: 354). As these two examples have highlighted, within its very confines as a precarious and marginal practice, squatting ekes out alternative forms of belonging and rights to the city (Vasudevan 2015a; 2015b). This proves to be particularly invaluable in a political landscape that has confined those deemed appropriate urban citizens to those who subscribe to neoliberal ideals, side-lining, rejecting and actively precarising those who seek out different understandings of, and modes of belonging in, the city.

Therefore, through the utilisation of their multifaceted relationship with precarity, squatters are again able to deploy precarity itself as a means of resistance in the everyday. Through engaging with and reworking the very constructions of inner city gentrification and 'hipsterisation' that threaten squatting and other low-income homemaking practices, the crew constructed themselves as ubiquitous, and thus safe, in the urban

landscape. This incident also highlights the ways in which home unmaking, too, can form the basis for resistance in the face of domicidal policies. As with previous examples in this chapter, the crew utilised homemaking and home unmaking simultaneously to construct a meaningful and (relatively) long-lasting home. Ironically, by removing all external semblances of the squat as a place of residence, they were better able to establish and protect their home. This again highlights the complex and fluid nature of the home that home unmaking attests to, and the intrinsic, yet underexplored connections between homemaking and home unmaking (Baxter and Brickell 2014; Fernandez 2014).

‘I see myself as more of an occupier’: reappropriation as resistance

Chapter 5 considered the central position of rhetoric and discourse in the construction of squatters and social tenants as socially deviant, and thus deserving of the domicidal policies that target them. However, it was not until a meeting with one participant in particular that I began to consider the prevalence of language and rhetoric in the *reconstruction*, as well as destruction, of homemaking capacities among squatters. When I asked one participant, Harry, a question about his experiences of being a squatter, he responded, unexpectedly, that he in fact did not necessarily define himself as a squatter: rather, he saw himself as an ‘occupier’. He felt that this difference in language use was crucial, as ‘it can really change the conception of what someone is doing and why⁹⁶’. Harry saw squatting and political protest as intrinsically linked to one another, and felt that this was something that should be highlighted when talking about squatting, rather than maintaining an emphasis on squats as homes. Indeed, the majority of my squatter participants were very much politically active, with activist contributions ranging from the Occupy movement, to anti-Heathrow Airport expansion, to the Radical Housing

⁹⁶ Face to face interview, 16/07/2014.

Network. As has been previously discussed in Chapter 6, this can be a potentially unhelpful framing of squatting in terms of once again detaching the practice from homemaking and threatening to construct squatters around 'good' vs 'bad' binaries. However, as the following section will highlight, there are benefits to this kind of construction of squatters, enabling squatting to exist under the auspices of occupation, and therefore survive as a practice under section 144.

The strong links between squatting and political activism are not surprising considering that squatting movements in England and Wales have historically emerged from housing crises: most notably in the modern era in the aftermath of World War II and the severe housing shortage in London as a consequence of bomb damage (Finchett-Maddock 2014). The relationship between squatting and activism remains a strong one in contemporary times, with demand for housing accessibility and citizenship rights remaining fundamental to the current squatting movement (Dee 2014; Finchett-Maddock 2014; Reeve 2015). However, in the aftermath of section 144's implementation, attitudes towards and associations with 'squatting' as terminology have become particularly vitriolic, with longstanding implications of squatters as criminal figures concretised by the law change. Therefore, in a newly criminalised climate, squatting as a political movement has in some circumstances been reappropriated, re-emerging in a similar, yet in part hidden through a change in rhetoric, guise as 'occupation'. There has in recent years been a high-profile, and yet somewhat under-hand, resurgence of squatting under the auspices of occupation. Such forms of occupation have been utilised as a direct action tactic, although such resistance has tended to be directed at wider concerns relating to the housing crisis, rather than calls to repeal section 144 specifically.

This recent trend arguably began with the 2013 occupation by the direct action collective Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth (HASL) of the UK's most expensive council house on the eve of its sale by Southwark Council for nearly £3 million. In their engagement with the media, HASL

specifically referred to their actions as an occupation in protest of Southwark Council's decision to sell much-needed social housing in the midst of a housing crisis in the capital (Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth 2013). Although media coverage of the protest did not entirely abolish references to the group as squatters, references to the event as an occupation, with HASL members framed as protesters, also became widely permeated in news reporting (see Blunden et al 2013; Smyth et al 2013; Withnall 2013). The protestors also made it clear in their interviews with the press that they did not intend to live in the property, that they all had homes to return to, and that the purpose of their occupation was purely political.

This detachment of political occupation and direct action from its relationship with squatting works in two ways as a resistive technique. Firstly, it deploys the practice of squatting itself as a tactic of resistance, using the transient and precarious nature of squatting to highlight government dismantling of social housing provision and the precarious future that such actions will bring for London's low-income residents. Secondly, the tactic worked to protect squatting post-section 144 by distancing the practice from associations of home, instead framing it as occupation, a solely political act detached from popular public assumptions that assume squatters to be guileful home-thieves. By connecting squatting in a residential building with protests centred on the wider housing crisis, whilst at the same time detaching it from understandings of home, squatters are potentially able to circumvent arrest under section 144 (which notably states that it is illegal to squat in a residential building *if you intend to live there*), both keeping the practice alive and using it to convey important messages relating to the housing crisis. Indeed, at a meeting I attended in a squatted social centre in south London in July 2014, members of HASL were present and, referring to their occupation of the Southwark council house the previous year, explicitly suggested during a talk they gave that protest can indeed be a tactic in the protection of residential squatting. They told the audience that when they had squatted the £3 million council house,

they had largely been left alone by the police even though they were in a residential building because they had framed their actions as 'protesting' and 'occupying' rather than 'residing'.

One of my participants, Rob, a former London squatter, also alluded to the squatting-as-occupation tactic when he told me that an old crew of his had once opened up a residential building in central London in the middle of the day in full public view as a means of protesting the implementation of section 144 and the wider housing crisis. Indeed, I myself attended and spoke at a conference held in this squat that focused on rallying resistance to MIPIM (a four-day annual real estate exhibition usually held in Cannes, but hosted in London in 2014 and 2015). The conference was widely attended, the audience predominately consisting of a mix of activists, academics and sympathetic politicians, including then-leader of the Green Party, Natalie Bennett. Despite the very public nature of the residential building's use, the conference ran relatively undisturbed by police for two days. Again, here section 144 appeared to be circumvented on the basis that the building had been utilised for the purposes of political protest, rather than for residence. The fact that some people had spent at least one night sleeping in the building in order to ensure that it could be used for the conference the following day appeared to have gone unnoticed by police, perhaps due to the fact that the building had been open up so brazenly and was very clearly hosting a public event.

Forced eviction as a method of resistance: the case of Focus E15

This squatting-as-occupation technique has been most famously utilised in London by the grassroots campaign group Focus E15. The group used squatting as a means of direct action campaigning in order to both highlight and perform the trauma of forced eviction. Focus E15 originally consisted of single homeless mothers housed in a hostel in the borough

of Newham. When in 2013 the hostel began evicting tenants due to public funding cuts, residents were told that they would be moved as far from London as Birmingham and Hull, miles from their jobs, their children's schools and family networks. In response, and after a chance meeting with a local subset of the Revolutionary Communist Group, the soon-to-be evicted group set up their campaign and protested regularly outside Newham Council's offices. The group gained high levels of local, and eventually national, media coverage which eventually led to their being rehoused in Newham rather than elsewhere (Watt 2016). In the wake of this victory, Focus E15 became involved in housing activism more broadly, and has become ubiquitous in the struggle against gentrification and displacement in Newham, running a weekly street stall and organising protests, public meetings and other grassroots modes of resistance. In September 2014, they engaged in their most well-known and widely publicised direct action campaign, occupying a disused block of flats on the Carpenter's Estate in Stratford. The block had been earmarked for demolition in order to make way for a new UCL campus. However, despite these plans falling through (in part due to the controversy of the evictions due to take place), the council continued to decant residents from perfectly functional social housing under the auspices that regeneration of the site would eventually occur (Watt 2013). During the two-week Focus E15 campaign, the flats were broken into by the group and opened up to the public in the form of a social centre, hosting a daily programme of events including workshops, classes and performances. Unlike the HASL occupation of the Southwark council house, the actions of the Focus E15 group were not referred to in media coverage as squatting (see for example Amara 2014; Dubuis 2014; Kwei 2014). Despite the fact that an entire block of flats was occupied for two weeks with high-profile local and national press coverage, the Focus E15 campaigners were not arrested under section 144, and when Newham Council took the group to court in order to evict them, Focus E15 won the right to remain in the flats for the duration of their planned two-week protest (see focuse15.org for more details). Indeed, Focus

E15's reappropriation of squatting-as-occupation appeared to be so successful that I found myself being chastised for remarking otherwise. During a meeting I attended on the housing crisis organised by a squatting collective in Oxford around the time of the Carpenter's Estate occupation, I made a throwaway comment referring to Focus E15 as squatting the estate. A fellow speaker proceeded to shoot me a warning glance before brusquely correcting me that I shouldn't refer to the campaign as squatting as the group took shifts and did not technically live there.

The campaign, and in particular the Carpenter's Estate occupation, led to the successful re-opening of some of the flats to people in priority housing need (Watt 2016). The appropriation of squatting by campaign groups within the wider housing activism movement, then, appears to be a useful tool in securing both publicity and tangible gains in the form of access to housing. By challenging their own experiences of domicile, in terms of their forced eviction from the hostel and the threat of displacement, and making their precarious living conditions public, Focus E15 succeeded in opening up new homes for others.

Although their membership has extended beyond single mothers, and their current campaigns are far-reaching across different elements of the housing crisis, the Focus E15 collective remain most well-known as a gendered group. Their position within the popular imaginary as young mothers being evicted and threatened with displacement across the country has proved a large factor in their popularity and influence. Through presenting themselves as young mothers without a home within which to raise their children, their last semblances of home taken from them as they sought to lose proximity to family support networks, Focus E15 became symbolic of housing precarity in London. More than this, they utilised both the gender norms associated with their roles as mothers, and the domicile enacted upon them by their local authority, to shame those in power into retracting some of their decisions. As Brickell (2014) has highlighted in her work with women activists in

Cambodia, both expected gender tropes and the very thing (the home) that is under threat, can be utilised as powerful tools in resistance movements. Brickell's research revealed the ways in which women protesting the demolition of their homes in the Boeung Kak Lake region of Phnom Penh deployed strategies such as protesting naked and wearing models of houses, nests, and other imagery associated with the home, during their campaign to save their homes from demolition. Such strategies mobilise gender norms to act as a means of shaming those enacting domicide by making public the ways in which such forced eviction sought to strip away women's access to domestic life. Similarly, the Focus E15 group's public positioning as mothers whose homes, commonly framed as being at the core of domesticity and motherhood, have been destroyed by the actions of politicians proved an invaluable tactic in their success. Such tactics again elucidate precarity as a dynamic process that has the potential to provide a means of resistance and a challenge to social injustice, as well as a means of destruction and instability (Waite 2009). The utilisation of imagery that pertains to motherhood and domestic life also acts to shame and direct responsibility towards government actors whose political decision-making has severely dismantled the homemaking capacities of vulnerable figures in society – in this case young single mothers (Philo 2005).

However, although the campaign work of Focus E15, HASL and others centres on demands for fairer housing and the rights of low-income Londoners to remain in their homes, much of the method's success conversely relies on separating the act of occupation itself from homemaking. By detaching squatting from connotations of home through positioning their actions as an occupation rather than the reclaiming of the flats for their own residential purposes, the group's actions were emblematic of the transformative potential of home unmaking: that through the loss or emission of one form of home, another can rise from its ashes (Baxter and Brickell 2014). Through making public the potential of squatting to reclaim and remake space,

and simultaneously rendering the practice invisible by removing any semblance of home (and thus avoiding any negative connotations associated with squatting), Focus E15 were able to both resist section 144 and challenge broader concerns of the housing crisis. This places the occupation at an intriguing nexus of resistance that is both visible and invisible, homely and unhomely. By utilising precarity to highlight widespread concerns around London's housing crisis and the impact of forced eviction, the campaign simultaneously concealed the ever-more precarious nature of squatting in the post-criminalisation landscape. Disguising and repurposing squatting in order to both protect a protest and focus conversation on the trauma of forced eviction, rather than the criminality of squatting has clearly proved somewhat successful in this instance. However, some concerns must be noted when squatting is reappropriated in this way, as the final section of this chapter will discuss.

The danger of disguising squatting

The Focus E15 Carpenter's Estate occupation is a powerful example of direct action protest that helped to bring to light the realities of Coalition housing policy on the ground in inner London. The group also resisted section 144 via the fact that they were 'squatting by another name' in a very public way. However, it can be argued that the occupation actually did little in terms of altering negative perceptions of squatting itself in the long-term. By engaging in a highly public instance of squatting, whilst remaining detached from squatting as a practice, the Carpenters Estate occupation in some ways threatens to legitimise negative associations of squatting. This is a different form of the 'hiding in plain sight' tactic discussed previously, where detaching themselves from squatting and homemaking has proved a crucial means of survival and home maintenance for squatters. Rather, this was a public act that could have

potentially been used to sympathise with squatters and call for the repeal of section 144 in a more concrete way. The act of squatting, although in fact a key element of Focus E15's activist strategies, remained hidden.

Indeed, the relationship between squatters/anti-section 144 campaigners and wider London housing crisis campaigners remains a somewhat disjointed one, with squatting remaining on the periphery of the core concerns of housing unaffordability and the reduction of social housing in the capital. For example, when discussing an upcoming conference exploring the housing crisis and its activism with one of its organisers, I was told that squatters had initially not been invited to run a session. The organiser assured me that this had not been because they had thought squatting was irrelevant, or that the repeal of section 144 was not an important cause, but that there were simply so many different voices and activist movements in London that they could not find the space to include squatters. However, they said that the organising committee were then told that 'the squatters are angry with you', for not including them in the conference programme. Not wanting to cause any friction between activist communities, the conference organisers subsequently decided to invite a group of squatters to speak.

This incident I argue highlights several important points in regards to some of the methods of resistance employed by squatters that have become necessary in the post-section 144 landscape, and the complex and at times counterproductive outcomes achieved. On the one hand, despite their peripheralisation, squatting groups continue to associate themselves with wider housing movements, in this instance eventually gaining themselves a place on the conference line-up. By aligning their experiences of home destruction with the plight of more high-profile and sympathy-inducing cases of domicile, squatting has the potential to become a more popularised possibility for providing alternative visions of housing and the city. Such appropriation and alignment of squatting with wider concerns regarding the housing crisis in London and other parts of the UK may well encourage the prioritisation of section 144's

repeal from activist groups in future campaigns. However, on the other hand, the conference organisers' initial decision not to include a session on squatting also highlights the continued demarcation of squatting from other activist movements. This is despite the fact that Focus E15, who have very publicly and successfully utilised squatting as a method of political protest, were one of the co-organisers and key speakers at this particular event. This once again alludes to the 'good squatter/bad squatter' rhetoric raised by many of my participants, and noted through my own observations during many conversations, both casual and professional, with friends, colleagues and others interested in my research. Squatters who are seen to resist section 144 are often immediately categorised as 'bad squatters' without just cause unless their campaign is tied to wider housing concerns. Whilst the resistance movement of Focus E15, and their squatting-as-occupation resistance technique, is seen as pivotal in housing crisis activism, more traditional squatting groups were initially side-lined as lacking enough relevance to the wider crisis to make the cut in the original conference line-up. Therefore, squatter activist movements remain in something of a Catch-22 when it comes to aligning their concerns with more popular housing crisis activism. On the one hand, associating themselves with squatting-as-occupation activists such as Focus E15 may eventually encourage a better perception of squatting, thus highlighting section 144 as a domicidal policy. However, on the other, squatters remain somewhat othered in the wider activism scene, often constructed as peripheral to the central concerns of the movement despite the efforts of some squatter groups to involve themselves in wider housing crisis campaigning.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the multifaceted ways in which squatters and social tenants have resisted section 144 and the bedroom tax. Just as the impacts of the policies, discussed in the previous chapter, are compounding and varied, so too are the methods of resistance employed to contest them. Public protests actively make visible the ways in which the policies instil precarity, thus utilising precarity itself as a tool of resistance and mobilisation (Waite 2009). The use of legal and policy frameworks to both provide resilience against and subversively challenge the policies through the very mediums in which they were established, work to legitimise opposition to the policies on the same legal and policy grounds as their implementation. Multiple small-scale grassroots acts of resistance work to establish activism as something accessible to all: instances of active citizenship that seek to highlight and reform spatial social injustice (Delaney 2016). Social media support groups encourage social tenants affected by the bedroom tax to challenge the policy via the legal spaces of the courtroom, whilst squatters repurpose gentrifier aesthetics to ensure the relative protection of their homespace. Finally, the chapter considered the ways in which squatting has been reappropriated as 'occupation'. By detaching the practice from connotations of both squatting and homemaking, and masking it as a method of protesting the housing crisis more broadly, rather than section 144 explicitly, resistance is deployed as simultaneously visible and invisible, engaged in both homemaking and home unmaking, and the inherent linkages between the two (Baxter and Brickell 2014; Fernandez 2014).

The multiple methods of resistance undertaken in relation to both policies have been particularly notable in terms of the ways in which they utilise the very structures that have caused domicidal impacts in the first place. Precarity has been deployed as a means of mobilisation, acting as a common language of resistance for those such as the bedroom tax

Facebook groups. Others have made public the precarious consequences of the policies in order that they might be opposed on a wider public scale. And home unmaking has been used in order that new homespaces might be secured and maintained, as in the case of the south London crew removing any semblances of home from their squat in order to protect their home. Such methods that deploy precarity and home unmaking as tools of resistance reveal a continuing autonomy and ability to construct the city, and homespaces within the city, even in the harsh urban landscape of austerity London. Perhaps for squatters and social tenants, then, the only way in which to take back control of their homemaking capacities is to repurpose the very structures of precarity and domicile that are at the core of section 144 and the bedroom tax.

However, whilst similar frameworks are found in resistance against both policies, the techniques used by squatters and social tenants remain inherently different. Anti-bedroom tax campaigns are able to utilise widespread professional and public concern in regards to the impacts of the policy, particularly in regard to its disproportionate effect on people with disabilities. However, to instigate public methods of resistance and bold legal challenges, anti-section 144 campaigners must employ subtler strategies. Although historically linked, squatting has long been seen as peripheral to concerns around social housing. Conversely to the bedroom tax, section 144 is often seen as, rather than the destruction of home, a legally just decision protecting people's homes from the domicidal actions of squatters. This ultimately leaves squatters reliant on more subversive methods that involve reworking squatting as a practice, whereby their precarious and transient position in fact often proves their most successful means of transgressing the domicile enacted upon them.

Chapter 9.

Conclusion

This thesis has told the stories of two seemingly disparate groups of Londoners. At first glance, it might be somewhat unclear what Jane, a middle-aged woman with severe arthritis living with and caring for her chronically ill daughter, might have in common with Tariq, a young, single man squatting a former pub disguised as bike shop. Yes, they have both borne the brunt of housing policies that have undermined their ability to secure and maintain a home in London – but their housing biographies, their current lifestyles and projected housing futures remain vastly different. And yet, they are fundamentally connected. Jane, Tariq, and all the other squatters and social tenants that I met and spoke with over the course of this research are all understood, albeit in different ways and in varied contexts, as socially parasitical in socio-political rhetoric. Decades of a neoliberal agenda that constructs the concept of the home as a site of personal ownership and financial investment have concurrently dismissed huge swathes of the population as unproductive, and therefore unvaluable, citizens. Squatters and social tenants are maligned and discredited on the basis of their housing choices, left to face the threat of forced eviction, to spiral into mental health crises, and to ‘prove’ themselves as worthy of existing in London despite their tenure. The wide range of people affected highlights the brutal reality that so many Londoners are treated, both in rhetoric and practice, as people who are undeserving of home. This thesis therefore acts as a focused exploration of a much wider issue: that every day, Londoners across the city are being denied the right to home. I argue that it is this dismantling of low (and increasingly middle)-income citizens’ ability to secure and maintain affordable, long-term homes in the capital that lies at the heart of London’s supposed housing crisis. What we are witnessing is not merely a crisis of national indebtedness, nor is it the logical response to a bloated welfare state. It is the consequence of active

decision-making and the construction of rhetoric that establishes some lives as more worthy of home than others.

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The thesis has highlighted how the criminalisation of squatting and the bedroom tax link to three key areas of policy and scholarly interest. First is the changing nature of welfare in the UK, and the relationship between social disadvantage and policy rhetoric in shaping public attitudes towards squatters and social tenants. Second, the thesis initiates better understanding of what impact the policies have made on the homelives of squatters and social tenants, and on housing segregation and affordability more broadly. Third, it highlights the multifaceted ways in which different squatters and social tenants protest and resist the two policies. Although retaining a focus on analysis of in-depth semi-structured interviews with a range of participants, including squatters, social tenants and housing association employees, over the course of the project a multifaceted methodological approach emerged. The constructions of squatters and social tenants, the impacts of the policies, and the ways in which they are resisted compound to form complex, entrenched understandings of section 144, the bedroom tax and their role in wider social politics. As a consequence of the compounded nature of the research and its impacts, so too have my methodologies taken multiple formats. In order to fully understand the consequences of the policies, a methodological approach that encompassed both critical discourse analysis of political speeches and media articles, and a political ethnography approach was adopted. This three-fold methodological approach enabled me to understand in greater depth how it has come to pass that squatters and social tenants are constructed as socially unproductive, and thus understood as undeserving of rights to home in the city. Critical

discourse analysis of key political speeches in particular highlighted the lineage of home in political rhetoric, and the ways in which this rhetoric has constructed squatters and social tenants as deviant citizens. A political ethnography approach reflected my growing contribution to housing activism, a consequence of my growing concern and desire to 'do something' about the at times distressing stories of participants.

Conceptually, the thesis has argued for the centrality of geographies of home literature in furthering understandings of citizenship and housing. Throughout, I highlight the importance of understanding the ways in which social and political constructions of home are deployed in intimate governance practices, particularly in the context of citizenship construction through tenure. This is explored in relation to domicile, home unmaking and precarity, whereby the precarisation of forms of homemaking, such as social tenancy and squatting, not deemed conducive to the appropriate behaviour of citizens, is justified as fair. This moralisation of the home both unravels the homemaking capacities of already vulnerable Londoners, and, more concerning still, establishes the increased precarisation of their homelives as both normative and morally sound.

The remainder of the chapter further outlines the contributions this thesis has made to geographical scholarship. I go on to look forward, both in terms of the predicted futures of both section 144 and the bedroom tax, and in terms of a wider call for a rethink of how we understand housing and home in London. The chapter, and the thesis as a whole, concludes by calling for a re-hauling of the ways in which we construct citizens by disconnecting moral constructions of citizens from their tenure status.

Contributions of the thesis to geographical scholarship

The contributions of this thesis to geographical scholarship can be directly linked to the three core conceptual strands of the research: critical geographies of home (and in particular domicile and home unmaking), intimate governance, and precarity.

Domicide and home unmaking

Conceptually, this research has contributed to and furthered critical geographies of home literature in two key ways. Firstly, and following on from previous work, I have sought in my discussions of the home to extend understandings of domicile beyond solely the destruction of or displacement from the physical dwelling (Nowicki 2014). I have considered the ways in which homemaking capacities are destroyed in a variety of ways through the implementation of the bedroom tax and section 144. In particular, Chapter 5 highlighted the ways in which domicile is enacted through political rhetoric that frames social tenants and squatters as undeserving of home. Such rhetoric therefore justifies policies that dismantle the homemaking capacities of social tenants and squatters as morally sound decisions. This is an important addition to understandings of domicile as it encapsulates understandings of home far beyond the household alone. Whilst this has been widely discussed in critical geographies of home literature in relation to homemaking, domicile has in comparison remained a somewhat unexplored concept in terms of remaining relatively undiscussed beyond the bricks and mortar of the dwelling (Nowicki 2014).

The thesis also contributes to the concept of home unmaking posited by Baxter and Brickell (2014), in particular focusing on the little-explored relationship between home unmaking and class-based injustice. I

explore and extend discussion of the relationship between homemaking, home unmaking and class inequality through focusing on the ways in which those responsible for policies that dismantle the homespace for particular groups of citizenry themselves utilise strategies of both homemaking and home unmaking simultaneously to promote ideological and citizenship-constructing agendas. In Chapter 8 in particular, I highlight the ways in which homemaking and unmaking are intrinsic to one another, with the domicile instigated by section 144 and the bedroom tax inciting new forms of homemaking in response. This can be seen in some of the stories told in Chapter 8, for example Tariq's crew disguising their home within hipster bike shop aesthetics – unmaking their home in order to ensure its protection. Therefore, I argue that this thesis has provided concrete examples of the ways in which both homemaking and home unmaking are together integral in furthering our understanding of the home as an important political site (Fernandez 2014).

A second key contribution to geographical scholarship has been the ways in which this thesis has strengthened the connections between critical geographies of home and housing studies. An ongoing lack of dialogue between the two disciplines, despite their being clearly highly connected to one another, has produced a disconnection between studies of home and socio-economic studies of housing, with the home often seen as an apolitical concept and thus often dismissed in the broader social sciences, particularly in housing studies (Atkinson and Jacobs 2016; Baxter et al 2016). This thesis, however, has placed the home at the centre of understanding housing policy. In particular, I have highlighted how a lineage of political rhetoric has established understandings of the correct means of homemaking through the medium of housing tenure, using emotive language around the home and homemaking in order to establish housing policies and structures that laud some (homeowners) and deride others (social tenants and squatters in the context of this thesis) (Nowicki 2017a; 2017b). I argue that discussion of housing policy through the lens of the home encourages wider understanding of housing

policy as not only having immediate and short-term social and economic implications, but that it also highlights that constructions of the ideal home influences long-term societal change and attitudinal shifts in relation to housing policy. In the context of this thesis, the contemporary moralisation of housing tenure has had profound implications for those who are not engaged in these ideal constructions of homemaking. In the UK context, these constructions are intrinsically bound to homeownership as being symbolic of successful citizenship. Housing and the home are clearly intrinsically connected to one another, and to dismiss or underplay the role of the home in shaping housing policy decisions, and in turn the impact that housing policy has on how we construct and perceive the homespace, is to undermine the importance of both housing and home as key sites of political governance and control. The disconnection between studies of home and housing policy is an issue that this thesis has therefore sought to both highlight and redress.

Intimate governance

As well as contributing to and furthering critical geographies of home scholarship and its relationship with housing studies, much of the discussion within the thesis has attended to extending conceptualisations of the class-based nature and implications of intimate governance practices. Intimate governance in relation to other forms of social categorisation such as gender, race and sexuality have been explored and analysed by a range of geography and sociology scholars (for example Bell and Binnie 2000; 2006; Hewitt 2005; Plummer 2001; 2013; Puar 2013). And yet, the relationship between class and intimate governance has remained relatively under-researched, despite the clear linkages between class and modes of governance that infiltrate the most intimate spaces of everyday life. This is particularly pertinent in relation

to housing and the home in the UK, with the homespace regularly utilised as a means of citizenship construction. The two policies central to this thesis are both enactments of intimate governance that are predominately class-based. The bedroom tax is an example of the ways in which government policy moralises the ways in which working-class citizens such as social tenants utilise their homes, demarcating certain rooms as 'spare' and thus constructing social tenants as wasting valuable public assets. Section 144 in some ways goes further than this by illegalising a form of homemaking through the class-based moralisation of particular groups of citizens. Section 144 not only acts as an invasive act of government legislation that is enacted via the home lives of squatters, but it also essentially seeks to eradicate an alternative homemaking practice in its entirety. In cities such as London, the classed implications of such decision-making are enormous. Policies such as the bedroom tax and section 144 are 'stepping past the front stoop' (Domosh 1998: 276) to dismantle the homemaking capacities of those on low and no-incomes in the city, moralising them as undeserving of the right to home in a high-value city such as London. Policies such as these establish themselves through the governance of everyday life. They moralise citizens' homes, a site deemed intrinsic to our identity construction, establishing a 'common sense' understanding of who is deserving, and who is undeserving, of a home in the capital. This is a form of stigmatisation that specifically utilises the homespace to demarcate who is socially valuable from who is socially deviant, excluding those whose housing choices do not meet neoliberal constructions of the ideal citizen. Such modes of intimate governance in turn contribute to the ongoing displacement of working-class and low-income populations from London under the auspices of 'regeneration' and urban renewal (Campkin 2013; Hodkinson and Robbins 2013). I argue, therefore, that greater attention needs to be paid to the linkages between intimate governance, class and urban displacement if we are to establish coherent resistances to the ongoing social cleansing taking place in cities such as London. This is particularly important in relation to the home. As a site

so often demarcated from politics in political narratives, the exclusion and stigmatisation of lower-income citizens is portrayed as inherent when pursued through the homespace. As this thesis has demonstrated, the demonisation of social tenants and squatters has been constructed through rhetoric that establishes them as selfish individuals, living in hedonistic squalor or taking up valuable space that has been handed to them, a narrative that is particularly easy to push when we are told incessantly that we are in the midst of a protracted housing crisis. This research has provided an account of these intimate governance practices, and I hope will encourage future policies that pertain to home and intimate life, and the rhetoric that sustains them, to be further scrutinised.

Precarity

A third key contribution of this thesis to geographical scholarship has been in its expansion of the concept of precarity beyond solely workplace and labour market processes. Precarity has become ever-more more entrenched and compounded into multiple facets of society in the post-recession, austerity-focused era. Its ongoing prominence means that it has become essential to consider the changing relationship between forms of political injustice, such as displacement, discrimination and dispossession, and the ways in which citizens resist such injustices. In the UK, a reduction in the power of labour unions and political disenfranchisement in relation to the welfare state has inevitably altered the ways in which citizens can challenge destructive policy and legislature. Alongside this, the normalisation of precarity and the encouragement of suspicion towards people who remain welfare dependent or outside of normative socio-political structures has made it harder to garner widespread support for issues such as section 144 or the bedroom tax. The concept of precarity has therefore been integral in

establishing a dualistic understanding of section 144 and the bedroom tax as both exemplary of the ways in which precarity has become embedded as a social norm, and as a means of expressing social injustice.

Precarity and its implications beyond the workplace alone have begun to be explored within social sciences literature, with scholars for example examining the relationship between precarity, biopolitics and the self, and the impact of a growing entrenchment of a national sense of precarity relating to issues of belonging and home (see Allison 2013; McCormack and Salmenniemi 2016). Within geography specifically, an upcoming special issue convened by myself and a colleague seeks to extend geographies of precarity literature through an exploration of the cultural implications of precarity (Harris and Nowicki, in preparation). Beyond the labour market, precarity is produced, experienced and resisted in everyday settings, embedded and responded to in cultural imaginaries, and transformative of senses of place, self and temporality. If post-Fordist capitalism made precarity a 'defining feature of contemporary life' (Gill and Pratt 2008; 20), then in the wake of global recession and widespread austerity precarity is being further expanded and solidified as both a pervasive circumstance of contemporary life, labour and the urban. Precarity enacts a geographical imaginary through which precarious lives are justified, romanticised and resisted (Peck 2012, Vasudevan 2015a; Harris and Nowicki, in preparation).

The discussions within this thesis also contribute to and extend Lewis et al's framework of hyper-precarity (Lewis et al 2015). Throughout the thesis, I utilised the concept of hyper-precarity to highlight the ways in which the domicile and home unmaking enacted upon squatters and social tenants entrenched precarity into multiple and compounding aspects of their home lives. These included the reality or fear of forced eviction, the impact of the policies on squatters and social tenants' mental health, and the ways in which the policies instilled shame into squatters and social tenants' understandings of their condition and housing circumstances. Understanding precarity through the lens of

home also highlighted the multivalent ways in which squatters and social tenants resist the policies, often using precarity as a rallying point or means of apportioning responsibility. This thesis therefore attests to these multifaceted components of precarity by engaging the concept with geographies of the home and intimate governance. Through this threefold conceptual lens, I have therefore highlighted precarity as an invasive, entrenched and normalised contemporary condition.

Looking ahead: the future of section 144 and the bedroom tax

This thesis has provided an account of the overwhelmingly negative impacts of section 144 and the bedroom tax. And yet, as Chapter 8 in particular attests to, these devastating impacts have also highlighted the courage, persistence and creativity of those that have sought to resist them. But is there any hope that either policy will be repealed?

At the time of writing some legal headway has been made in reducing the impact of the bedroom tax. This has occurred on a variety of legal scales, with resistance tactics such as the Facebook groups discussed in Chapter 8 using prior legal rulings to exempt themselves from the bedroom tax in Upper Tier tribunals, and the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court rulings that deem the policy is unlawful in the case of a couple who need to sleep separately due to one's chronic medical condition, a young man who needs overnight care, and a woman needing a panic room in order to protect herself from a violent ex-partner. These rulings are certainly a step in the right direction for anti-bedroom tax campaigners, and tenants challenging the policy on similar grounds have undoubtedly been greatly assisted by the ceaseless campaigning undertaken, as many will now be able to build a case for their own eligibility for exemption based on these rulings. However, while it may have been weakened, under the current Conservative minority government the policy remains as a whole intact. Full repeal of the policy is highly unlikely to occur under a Conservative

administration, although leader of the opposition Jeremy Corbyn has retained the promise of his predecessor Ed Miliband that the bedroom tax will be repealed should Labour enter government.

There has been comparatively little public interest, either negative or positive, in the criminalisation of squatting since its introduction in 2012. This has proved to be something of a double-edged sword for squatters. On the one hand, there has been minimal political uptake in terms of repealing the law change, the most significant being an early-day motion calling for repeal submitted by now-shadow chancellor John McDonnell in 2013. However, on the other, the political appetite for extending criminalisation to include commercial properties also appears to have waned, providing a limited saving grace for those who continue to squat in these highly precarious circumstances. Although shortly after section 144's implementation there were calls from across the political spectrum, including from prominent Labour politicians, to extend the law (see Peck et al 2013), the impact of this appeared minimal, and the further criminalisation of squatting remains relatively absent from current political discourse. This in part may be related to one of the most prominent anti-squatting politicians, Mike Weatherley, losing his seat to a Labour candidate, and resigning from public life due to illness. Although squatting remains a highly precarious form of homemaking, the lessening interest in extending its criminalisation does provide squatters with at least some respite from legal persecution. However, it appears unlikely (and perhaps impossible under the current government) that section 144 will be repealed in the near future due to limited public sympathy for squatting as a practice.

Housing Londoners: reconnecting housing and home in policy

This thesis has predominately focused on two housing policies and their impacts. However, whilst I very much call for the repeal of both policies,

and by no means wish to downplay the relief and return of agency that this would bring for thousands of people in the capital and beyond, I nonetheless argue that such a decision would be a treatment of the symptoms, rather than the cause. London is embroiled in a housing culture whereby all sense of housing as home, rather than financial investment, appears to have been lost. We now live in a city where the average house price is over nine times the average salary (Piggott 2015; Nationwide 2017). A city where new housebuilding is often marketed to investors before it is to Londoners themselves. A city whose poor are decanted from their homes and moved out of the capital in the name of ‘regeneration’. A city where the poor that do remain are left to burn in their homes in one of the richest boroughs in the country⁹⁷, while wealthy Londoners look on from their luxury properties. What is needed is more than the repeal of policies such as section 144 and the bedroom tax. An entire rethink of what home means in the London context is essential if the gross inequalities present in the capital are to ever be redressed.

The Mayor of London Sadiq Khan has recently set out a vision for ‘good growth by design’, an intervention that calls on:

London’s architectural, design and built environment professions to help realise his vision of London as a city that is socially and economically inclusive as well as environmentally sustainable (Mayor of London and London Assembly 2017).

Whilst this is certainly a positive rhetorical step in both acknowledging the socio-economic disparities that run rife in the capital, and seeking to establish solutions to the many issues relating to housing shortages and

⁹⁷ I refer here to the recent tragedy at Grenfell Tower, where Kensington and Chelsea council’s desire to save £300,000 on external cladding contributed to a blaze that to date has claimed the lives of 80 people and left hundreds of residents homeless.

inequalities, it remains a long road to reducing income gaps and the limitations lower-income Londoners face in terms of maintaining secure housing in the city. I hope that this thesis can provide a springboard for further research that highlights the multifaceted struggles faced by lower-income citizens. I hope, too, that it will encourage greater calls for the re-introduction of truly affordable housebuilding in London, particularly in terms of increasing the levels of social housing in a city that has become almost impossibly unaffordable even to those on middle incomes. Before this can happen, more housing solutions need to focus on the ways in which the worth of citizens is so often defined by their housing tenure. One of the central arguments made in this thesis is that the power of political rhetoric should not be underestimated. Until social tenants, squatters and other citizens who do not, or cannot, aspire to homeownership are seen as more than social degenerates, but rather as people who have as much claim to home in London as anybody else, little will change.

Final thoughts

Ultimately, the story told throughout this thesis is one of class disparity and the invasion of neoliberal logics into every facet of both our own identities, and how we construct the identities of others. I have explored how the home has been dismantled, restructured and recontextualised for some of London's lowest income citizens, as well as revealing the ways in which they respond to and challenge these instances of intimate governance. The thesis revealed the rhetorics of austerity pragmatism espoused by the Coalition and Conservative governments in the wake of recession to be a fallacy. Instead, austerity has been deployed as a means of moralising housing policy decisions and furthering constructions of particular citizens as socially deviant and therefore undeserving of home.

I had hoped to end this thesis with a positive account of some structural shift in favour of squatters and/or social tenants. And certainly, the ongoing and public legal challenges to the bedroom tax provide a particularly hopeful outcome of persistent resistive action. Jeremy Corbyn's surprising and positive result at the June 2017 general election invokes yet more hope that we are witnessing a slow shift towards a kinder, more inclusive politics that does not automatically deride citizens because of their housing circumstances. However, the rhetoric of austerity and the welfare deficit currently remains steadfast, granted a new lease of life in the summer of 2016 via a political and economic climate made all the more precarious in the wake of the UK's imminent departure from the European Union.

What is most daunting, though by no means insurmountable, is that for London's housing system to truly change, it is an entire national attitude towards the home, and who is deserving of it, that needs to be addressed and restructured. However, currently, there is little in the way of hopeful signs that this is happening. To return to Grenfell Tower, the fire that took so many lives and destroyed the homes of so many more, highlights the horrific and systemic inequalities that continue to be steadfastly present within London's housing structures (Madden 2017). Grenfell signifies multiple layers of domicile, whereby Kensington and Chelsea's decision to install flammable cladding is intrinsically connected to more long-term, embedded and violent decision-making regarding the low-income, often social tenants that occupy post-war high-rises such as Grenfell. The brutal reality is that the lives of those within Grenfell were ultimately not considered grievable enough to warrant protection from death. This is about more than a housing crisis: this is a crisis of humanity and sociability within our city, whereby social tenants, squatters and others deemed to be degenerate citizens are literally left to burn in their homes.

Ultimately, as long as the idealised homespace is attributed to ownership, financialisation and equity, policies and legislature will

continue to dismantle the homemaking capacities of those seeking an alternative to neoliberal housing markets, and those who are unable to engage in the property market. In the meantime, we must keep fighting to ensure that London is one day a city that all, regardless of their socio-economic status or housing choices, have the right to call home.

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Appendix: list of participants

Type of interviewee	Date of interview	Gender	Borough lived in/works in	Mode of interviewing
Bedroom tax tenant	23/06/2014	Female	Wandsworth	Online interview (via Facebook)
Bedroom tax tenant	07/07/2014	Female	Camden	Face to face (not recorded)
Squatter	16/07/2014	Male	Camden	Face to face (recorded) and telephone
Squatter/housing activist	08/07/2014	Female	Lambeth (but campaigns are borough-wide)	Face to face (recorded)
Chair of housing activist group	24/07/2014	Female	Tower Hamlets (but campaigns are borough-wide)	Face to face (recorded)
Bedroom tax tenant	12/10/2014	Female	Camden	Face to face (not recorded)
Solicitor for housing charity	15/10/2014	Male	London-wide	Face to face (recorded)
Squatter	15/10/2014	Female	Southwark	Face to face (not recorded)
Squatter	15/10/2014	Male	Hackney	Face to face (not recorded)
Housing association welfare officer	28/11/2014	Male	Mainly north and west London	Face to face (recorded)
Anti-poverty charity case worker	15/12/2014	Male	Westminster	Face to face (recorded)
Drop-in advice centre co-ordinator	15/12/2014	Female	Westminster	Face to face (recorded)
Housing association welfare officer	19/12/2014	Female	London-wide, but predominately Newham	Face to face (recorded)
Bedroom tax tenant	16/01/2015	Female	Islington	Face to face (recorded)

Local councillor	29/01/2015	Male	Haringey	Face to face (recorded)
Squatter	11/02/2015	Male	London-wide, predominately central	Face to face (recorded)
Bedroom tax tenant	20/02/2015	Female	Harrow	Face to face (recorded)
Bedroom tax tenant	20/02/2015	Male	Harrow	Face to face (recorded)
Housing charity advice worker	05/03/2015	Female	Camden	Face to face (not recorded)
Bedroom tax tenant	19/05/2015	Female	Camden	Face to face (not recorded)
Squatter	14/07/2015	Female	Sipson (Grow Heathrow)	Face to face (recorded)
Squatter	16/07/2015	Male	Southwark	Face to face (recorded)
Squatter	16/07/2015	Male	Southwark	Face to face (recorded)
Squatter	16/07/2015	Male	Southwark	Face to face (recorded)
Leader of Lambeth Council	21/11/2016	Female	Lambeth	Telephone interview (not recorded)