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# Food Fight: Sharing Meals and Confronting Biopolitics in the Disciplinary City

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FOOD FIGHT: SHARING MEALS AND CONFRONTING BIOPOLITICS IN THE  
DISCIPLINARY CITY

by

Jeremy Sorenson

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in Geography

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

December 2013

## ABSTRACT

### FOOD FIGHT: SHARING MEALS AND CONFRONTING BIOPOWER IN THE DISCIPLINARY CITY

by

Jeremy Sorenson

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013

Under the supervision of Dr. Anne Bonds

This project interrogates the tensions surrounding food provision in Las Vegas, Nevada. More precisely, groups of ad hoc individuals, unaffiliated with local shelters or social service provision agencies intervene in homelessness and hunger in the city by showing up in places where homeless individuals congregate and provide food, water, basic medical sundries and companionship to those on the streets. Conversely, local officials and shelter administrators conceptualize these activities as damaging to homeless individuals and have acted to prohibit these acts of care. Engaging with key contributions in the geographic literature, I employ specific frameworks – critical poverty research, disciplinary bio- and necropolitical regimes and the politics of affective anarchism – to argue that the spatial practices of the local state in preventing these acts is not premised on a revanchist urge to sanitize the city and make it fit for capital accumulation. Rather, I argue that the disruption of ad hoc networks of care is better read as a disciplinary regime directed at a specific segment of the homeless population – the service resistant – ushering in a nascent urban necropolitics.

This dissertation is dedicated to those who died on the streets of Las Vegas during the months of my fieldwork in the city:

Patricia McCarter, age 59  
Date of death: March 5, 2012

Steven Curtis Anderson, age 63  
Date of death: May 26, 2012

Dean Rafferty, age 47  
Date of death: March 6, 2012

Jacob Jessup Porter, age 44  
Date of death: May 26, 2012

Frank W. Travis, age 53  
Date of death: March 10, 2012

John Wakefield Wynn, age 67  
Date of death: May 27, 2012

John Colatruglio, age 61  
Date of death: March 16, 2012

Miles Whitesell Siverling, age 70  
Date of death: May 27, 2012

Tony Brock, age 46  
Date of death: March 24, 2012

Alberto Tripoloni, age 72  
Date of death: May 29, 2012

Mauricio Franco, age 60  
Date of death: March 28, 2012

Carl William Denoyer, age 62  
Date of death: May 31, 2012

Terrence Derrick Heath, age 65  
Date of death: April 2, 2012

David Baker, age 50  
Date of death: June 10, 2012

Jackie Lee Hamblin, age 71  
Date of death: April 12, 2012

Sheldon Whipple, age 62  
Date of death: June 12, 2012

Michael Johnson, age 51  
Date of death: April 20, 2012

Jamie Valdez, age 29  
Date of death: June 19, 2012

Leroy M. Johnston, age 34  
Date of death: April 29, 2012

Destrian N. Cressman, age 31  
Date of death: June 24, 2012

Fidel Perales, Jr., age 68  
Date of death: May 16, 2012

Darwin James Barcomb, age 29  
Date of death: June 25, 2012

Robert Paul Booth, age 43  
Date of death: May 20, 2012

Jonah Lee Baron, age 60  
Date of death: July 4, 2012

Oscar Lopez-Acevedo, age 56  
Date of death: May 20, 2012

Juan Miguel Aguilar, age 50  
Date of death: July 6, 2012

Jeway Worthy Phillips, Jr., age 54  
Date of death: July 11, 2012

Eric W. Renholm, age 64  
Date of death: July 31, 2012

Frederic Samson Smith, age 72  
Date of death: July 12, 2012

Scott Alan Strebing, age 48  
Date of death: August 3, 2012

Kenneth Horvath, age 59  
Date of death: July 15, 2012

Michael G. Lewis, age 59  
Date of death: August 11, 2012

Daryl F. Hermann, age 57  
Date of death: July 17, 2012

Ricky Dell Liger, age 53  
Date of death: August 11, 2012

Elizabeth Jane Wiedow, age 45  
Date of death: July 18, 2012

Roger Leon Shartzler, age 46  
Date of death: August 17, 2012

Donald Catten, age 77  
Date of death: July 26, 2012

(Source: *Forgotten Voice*, 2013)

This dissertation is also dedicated to all those who take it upon themselves to assert their right to act and intervene whenever and wherever suffering exists.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The purpose of a dissertation is to provide analysis of an extended research project, recognize the context of this research within disciplinary literatures and, finally, to situate my contributions to the literature and stake out a particular theoretical claim as my own. However, there is a bit of dishonesty in this. This project is not singularly mine. Innumerable hands have touched this project in myriad ways. Before issuing "my" contribution to the geographic literature, I would like to take a moment and acknowledge those who inspired, motivated, enlightened and otherwise helped me on this journey. And, if I neglect anyone here, please know that it's due the inescapable post-project haze, not ingratitude. Without further ado, I would like to formally acknowledge those who have helped me produce the dissertation that follows:

Gail Sacco, whose activism and heart are truly a testament to human goodness. Your work *matters* and has touched so many lives. And don't just take it from me – I've heard this all around town. You once joked that you've made a lot of enemies in Vegas. Perhaps, but you've made many, many more friends.

The crew at Food Not Bombs Las Vegas and Project Aqua. You, in a word, rock. You've all been more than kind and more than welcoming during my months in Las Vegas. I sincerely thank you for that.

Christopher and Karen Sorenson, or as I know them, Dad and Mom. You may not realize it, but you've always accommodated my curiosity about the world. Sometimes it's the small things that matter; who knew that the little soft cover atlas you got me in second grade would've led – decades later – to this dissertation. To my sister



Laura, your chipperness on the phone always gave me a lift - even after a long day of wage work and writing. And to Lindsay, my other sister, thanks for “pestering” me with all the letters – especially the ones you sent to far, far afield Las Vegas. Now I'll have time write back. I promise!

My partner Jody. The only thing harder than writing a dissertation is living with someone writing a dissertation. Nonetheless, you've been a constant source of love and support. I deeply appreciate that. Now that this work is done, I look forward to the next chapter of our lives together.

I'm very lucky to have a rock star committee: to Drs. Kristin Sziarto, Judith Kenny, Rina Ghose, Tracey Heatherington and Jenna Loyd, thank you for all of your work and guidance and accommodation. I'm a better scholar for it.

Dr. Anne Bonds, my Major Professor and Advisor Extraordinaire. What would I have done without your unending dedication to this project? This journey has been full of twists and turns, moments of clarity and ups and downs, but you've been a constant source of support, encouragement and, when needed, enforcement. I can only hope this project meets the faith you've put into it.

And, finally, to Clara. After all these years, you're still a wonder. Now that the writing process has come to an end, there is a catnip fish and a laser pointer with your name on it...

I would like, then, to end<sup>†</sup> by putting in a good word for the nonindustrious poor. At least they aren't hurting anyone. Insofar as the time they're taking off from work is being spent with friends and family, enjoying and caring for those they love, they're probably improving the world more than we acknowledge. Maybe we should think of them as pioneers of a new economic order that would not share our current one's penchant for self-annihilation (Graeber, 2012, p390).

---

<sup>†</sup> Or, in this case, begin

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On February 19, 2006, Gail Sacco was arrested by the Las Vegas Metropolitan police. Her crime was handing out unauthorized sandwiches and vegetable soup to homeless individuals in Huntridge Circle Park. More than 25 people, mostly homeless individuals, showed up to eat, resulting in a municipal citation that Sacco, a member of Food Not Bombs Las Vegas (FNBLV)<sup>1</sup> "did willingly and unlawfully conduct (a food feeding) event at Huntridge Circle Park, where 25 people or more did participate or witness such event without obtaining a permit" (Pratt, 2006). The following November, the US District Court issued an injunction to suspend enforcement of the ordinance that justified Sacco's arrest.

In response, the City passed additional anti-homeless ordinances that sought greater specificity in the types and manners of acts that would result in sanction. For instance, one ordinance made sleeping near human feces a crime (*Las Vegas Sun*, 2009). This law was later repealed when two homeless men sued the City for being arrested in violation of it; they later settled and received a \$45,000 payment from the City of Las Vegas. Another proposed ordinance would restrict access around park playgrounds and their water areas (such as wading pools, sprinklers, play water cannons, and the like) to anyone 12 years of age or *younger*, except for parents or guardians accompanying the children, or individuals on an athletic field or court who are watching or participating in

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<sup>1</sup> Originally an anti-nuclear activist group formed in Cambridge, MA in 1980, Food Not Bombs (FNB) regularly *shares* food with homeless persons in highly visible locations (Butler and McHenry, 1992). Typically inspired by predominantly anarchist political and tactical frameworks, FNB has numerous autonomous local chapters throughout the globe. I collaborated for 5 months with one such chapter: Food Not Bombs Las Vegas (FNBLV). A thick discussion of FNBLV's tactics and philosophy will follow in Chapter 3, "*I Just don't know why they don't understand that we're alive!*" *Food sharing and the assembling of space in Las Vegas*.

an event (*Las Vegas Sun*, 2009). In responding to opposition to these ordinances, the City contended that they were drafted in such a way as to “improve Las Vegas’ quality of life” (*Las Vegas Sun*, 2009).

Heavy criticism of the city's tactics of arresting people for handing out food was multi-scalar: local protests kept the city's acts in the news cycle (Allen, 2006), and allowed the story of Sacco's arrest to "go viral," (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2006) causing a small international tourists' backlash that threatened to boycott Las Vegas (personal comm., June 2, 2012). The issue of homelessness, parks and care became a prominent issue in Las Vegas during the summer of 2006. On one hand, city officials, such as then-Mayor Oscar Goodman, attached acts of ad hoc<sup>2</sup> care to the enabling of homelessness: "[r]ather than giving someone a sandwich once a day, the city supports efforts to end the cycle of homelessness and address the issues that keep these individuals on the streets" (Ritter, 2006). On the other hand, critics charged that the tactics of arrest and the criminalization of care were responses of government "frustrated by the inability to fix" homelessness (Ritter, 2006). Ultimately, the city stopped using the police as a force to occupy parks and arrest food-bearing care-givers.

Instead, the Metro Police took the opportunity to “educate” the citizenry on the correct means of helping the homeless. The police would regularly patrol the Skid Row district, often coming into contact with ad hoc "street feeders." This contact was exploited as a moment in which to hand out a flier (Fig. 1.1) – put out jointly by the Southern Nevada Regional Planning Commission, and Help Hope Home, a consortium of shelter

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I will use the term "ad hoc" to refer to FNBLV, Project Aqua and other such groups. I use this term to denote individual persons coming together in loosely organized groups acting under their own direction and accord without directives or funding or administration - or mission statements – from any central or formalized body.

industry institutions – entitled “*How you can help end Homelessness in our Community! SOME DO’S & DON’TS*” (Southern Nevada Regional Planning Commission, n.d.). This flier discouraged direct aid to homeless persons; instead, those who care about “permanently” ending homelessness should volunteer their time or money to well-established charities, nonprofits, and shelters.

**SNRPC**  
Southern Nevada Regional Planning Commission

**How you can help end Homelessness in our Community!**  
**SOME DO'S & DON'TS**

**Do volunteer at a homeless service agency or homeless service event.**  
There are many agencies in our community in need of volunteers to help with day-to-day operations, special events and programming. Project Homeless Connect is another Great way to get involved and make a difference. For more information, [www.helpohopehome.org](http://www.helpohopehome.org) or call 455-5832.

**Do donate to a homeless service agency.**  
Agencies appreciate clothing, household items, resources and monetary donations, which help support their clients get back on track while living in shelters or transitioning into housing.

**Do donate to the Southern Nevada Homeless and Housing Trust Fund.**  
Help us implement permanent solutions to solve homelessness in our community through services and housing opportunities. The United Way is accepting monetary donations for the Trust Fund. Visit [www.uwsn.org](http://www.uwsn.org)

**Don't hand out food on the street.**  
Because of health & safety issues it is dangerous to distribute food on the street. Why? Food can be contaminated, traffic on the street gets backed up and we want you and the homeless individual on the street to be safe.

**Don't give out clothing or other items on The street.**  
Many items become discarded on the street creating debris. The agencies are left cleaning up the mess. Let's keep our streets clean, so the agencies can focus on helping people.

**Don't give money to panhandlers.**  
Providing money to panhandlers may only provide a temporary fix, but does not assist someone who is homeless to get off of the streets.

**For more information on donation and volunteer opportunities, visit [www.helpohopehome.com](http://www.helpohopehome.com) or call (702) 455-5832**

**Help Hope Home**  
Helping the Homeless in Southern Nevada  
[www.helpohopehome.org](http://www.helpohopehome.org)

Figure 1.1: “How you can help...!” Instructional leaflet handed to sandwich-bearing Good Samaritans by Las Vegas Metro Police.

This dissertation considers the complex politics of ad hoc food provision in Las Vegas. I draw from five months of collaborative ethnographic research with two ad hoc – and, I argue, activist – food provision groups: Food Not Bombs Las Vegas and Project Aqua, as well as from interviews with local government officials and homeless service providers. I

examine the initial criminalization, then marginalization and moralization of urban food-sharing within a disciplining, bio(necro)political (Nast, 2011) context. Through this focus, I imagine the ways that activists, shadow state<sup>3</sup> administrators, and officials of the local state produce, contest, subvert and resist multiple socio-cultural expressions of urban food provision. Further, my analysis situates these acts as occurring in the political context of homelessness and the broader urban processes that both produce and are produced by homeless individuals. However, through this project, I argue the novel spatialities of conflicts over food sharing and homelessness in Las Vegas spur a different set of questions and theoretical interventions that expand on – but complicate – much of the existing literature on homelessness and urban space in Geography. In what follows, I discuss the project's theoretical framework and situate my analysis therein. I will then connect these to the project's methodological choices and then provide a brief overview of the three chapters of the dissertation.

### *Theoretical frameworks*

Four broad theoretical frameworks animate my analysis of the case of food sharing in Las Vegas. Specifically, this dissertation draws from and contributes to urban scholarship on **homelessness and its intersections with public space** (Wright, 1997; Mitchell and Heynen, 2009; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2010; Sparks, 2010), **critical poverty research** – especially that examining the discursive production of poverty subjects (Katz, 1989; Piven and Cloward, 1993; Schram, 2000; Lawson, et al, 2008; 2010; Bonds, 2009) – and political geographic scholarship focusing on the **disciplinary bio- and necropolitical**

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<sup>3</sup> The geographic literature (Wolch, 1990; Mitchell, 2001; Fyfe and Milligan, 2002) terms those non-governmental, voluntarist organizations that accept government funds and engage in or supplement services government used to monopolize as the "shadow state."

**regimes** of statecraft (Foucault, 2003; Giroux, 2006; Fleetwood, 2006; Rose, 2009; Mirzoeff, 2011; Cowen and Siciliano, 2011; Merrill, 2012; as a local state concern, Painter, 2013). Finally, I read the work of FNBLV and PA through an **affective, anarchist framework** (The Free Association, 2010; Routledge, 2010; Clough, 2012; Springer et al, 2012) that challenges notions of the biopolitical.

In Chapter 2, *"What happens in Vegas...:" Las Vegas and the political context of food sharing*, I draw from scholarship on urban poverty and homelessness to map the context of food sharing politics through a focus on Las Vegas as field, with an additional focus on how the logics of the local state and the shelterplex meet and mesh in relation to ad hoc food sharing. Whereas the "shadow state" refers to the connections of non-state voluntary organizations to the public sector (Wolch, 1990), I use the term "shelterplex" to describe the networks of voluntary and nonprofit organizations' connections to the large emergency shelters of Las Vegas. That is, the geographies and networks of homeless service provision are not just state-to-voluntary-sector, but also voluntary-sector-to-shelter or nonprofit sector-to-local state (see Trudeau, 2008). For instance, volunteers attached to a large Las Vegas food bank are routinely encouraged by the bank to volunteer at a particular downtown shelter, who also receives large amounts of food from the food bank. This is also an admittedly artistic intervention, as "shelterplex" more readily captures the primacy of the shelter - and not so much the state - as the institutionalizing force in the lives of homeless individuals.

Indeed, those engaging in ad hoc food provision are doing so in the context of particular government responses to "American style" (Mitchell, 2011) homelessness and hunger. The recent history of urban homelessness is marked by two epochal events: the

waves of urban renewal in the downtowns of most US cities and the deinstitutionalization of those suffering from mental illness. With urban renewal, the widespread demolition of "blighted" downtown neighborhoods meant the elimination of cheap single room occupancy (SRO) hotels. For instance, in San Francisco, the South of Market neighborhood was largely demolished during the 1960s to make way for the construction of the Moscone Convention Center and Yerba Buena Gardens; 97 percent of cleared residents lived in residential hotels, with the best estimate being 40,000 hotel rooms destroyed (Groth, 1994, p283).

This foreclosed on inexpensive housing options in cities increasingly becoming gentrified centers of global capital that urban elites sought to "take back" from the poor and disorderly (Davis, 1990; Smith, 1996, 2002; Mitchell, 1997; McLeod, 2002; Peck, 2005). At the same time, the Reagan-era deinstitutionalization of those with mental illness, coupled with the loss of inexpensive SRO hotels, resulted in a marked increase in homelessness in the late 1970s to early 1980s (Dear and Wolch, 1987). Further, myriad cutbacks in social service and welfare provision further threatened precariously-situated workers and individuals (Wolch and Dear, 1993; Peck 2001; Piven, 2001; Krinsky and Reese, 2006), while at the same time hardening discourses that pathologize the poor and blame them for their poverty (Piven and Cloward, 1993; Schram, 2000; Applebaum, 2001; Peck, 2001; Lawson, et al., 2008; 2010; Bonds, 2009) all while "dominant" and "authoritative" poverty knowledges obscure the causes of poverty and broader processes of race, gender, family status, age and other positionalities (Lawson and St Clair, 2009; Lawson, 2012). These discourses and knowledges, in turn, are deployed so as a project of rendering technical (Li, 2007), and thus de-politicizing poverty.



Drawing from geographic literature on the discursive constructions of poverty, I argue that dominant geographical conceptualizations of homelessness articulated from a framework of the *punitive state* are limited in interrogating the particularities of the Las Vegas responses to homelessness and food sharing. This is not to say that state violence against homeless individuals is overstated. Instead, this study allies itself closer to those counter-literatures that build upon, but then depart from the revanchist reading of homeless(ness) response (Doherty, et. al., 2008; Laurenson and Collins, 2007; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2010; Daya and Wilkins, 2012). This departure ("postrevanchism?") emerges from the subject of this project's analysis. This project does not study homelessness directly; rather, I am interrogating the politics and contingencies of particular forms of *care and response to* homelessness. This particular focus pulls apart readings of antagonistic, revanchist urbanism by asking a different set of questions. I am not intervening here in questions about homeless individuals' right to *be* (Mitchell, 1997; 2003, Waldron, 1991), but rather posing Foucauldian questions about the agonistic right to *act* (Arendt, 2004; Foucault 2000) and, through particular acts, to hold the "truth regimes" (Cadman, 2012) of biopower and biopolitics accountable.

In further departure from the political economy of revanchism, through the chapters, I read the work of FNBLV<sup>4</sup> and ad hoc food sharers through Foucault's theoretical framework of revolts of counter-conduct. These revolts of conduct – "distinct from political or economic revolts" (Foucault, 1997, p196) – have specific objectives; in the case of Las Vegas, it is FNBLV who is not as much revolting against regulations of space *per se*, but against rules and ordinances and prescriptive, programmatic moralisms

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<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, I will provide a brief history of Food Not Bombs in Chapter 3.

that seek to stop food sharing done in specific ways for specific people *and* in specific places. That is, FNBLV is practicing resistance against being governed in particular ways and for particular purposes (Rajchman, 1997). And, stemming from this analytic, it becomes apparent that the ways FNBLV practiced resistance and answered the question of "why fight? (Campbell, 1998; Foucault 2000), that particular forms of governance were then launched in response<sup>5</sup>.

That is, while the revanchist literature focuses on violence through expulsion and jailing and police beatings as the drivers of homeless(ness) responses, other critiques move beyond the rubrics of violence to the *dominance* exhibited by processes of "correct" care (DeVerteuil, 2006; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2010; Evans, 2012) and the way the state and homeless individuals mesh and assemble (Lancione, 2010; Sparks, 2010) in space. Briefly, I argue here that the forced imposition of some homeless people into the category of "service resistant" puts into motion a series of (local- and shadow-) state acts meant to take away the agency of homeless individuals and those that might care about them in ways that force them into the shelterplex so that intransigent bodies can be subsumed into corrective disciplinary regimes.

As used by local officials and shelterplex administrators, "service resistance" describes the actions of those avoiding traditional shelters and their associated programs (such as meals, counseling, job training, or housing vouchers). Such activities may include urban camping or squatting, collecting recyclables for cash or eating at ad hoc food distribution events and was often conflated with mental illness by the local officials

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, in Chapter 2, the dogged continuance of ad hoc food sharing - affirmed, incidentally, by court cases weighing in favor of such groups - led to the creation of organized city- and shelterplex-sponsored "feedings," referred to as the Mayor's Faith Forum.

and shelterplex administrators I spoke to over the course of this research. This term, used to denote both behavior and individuals (i.e., *service resistant*) themselves was conceptualized by one local official as "no matter what you do, no matter how many times you offer [services], for whatever their reasons may be, they're resistant. Resistant to the help" (personal comm., July 19, 2012). This conceptualization privileges shelter-based help and service; one critique of the label of service resistance is that there are some services - such as ad hoc deliveries of care - that the so-called service resistant are quite willing to engage with and accept. Therefore, I contend the Las Vegas case is not just about removing homeless people from the spaces of capital accumulation, but rather is connected to the unwillingness of some homeless individuals to accept state- and shelter-related regimes of care..

My above distinction between violence and dominance foreshadows the second theoretical framework through which I view the Las Vegas case. More specifically, my choice of reading the struggles over care and food sharing as a struggle over the state's assumed right to dominate its subjects and to attempt to draw the boundaries of social networks spring from an explicitly anarchist framework (MacLaughlin, 1986; May, 1994; Call, 2002). This framework also, I argue, connects to and informs my choice of methods.

Such an anarchist reading of homeless policy and response can be co-constituted with the above-mentioned framework where domination and not revanchism is the lens from which I read the struggles over food sharing. In Las Vegas, it is not exclusively the case that the local state is seeking to make it so that homeless people have "nowhere to be" as a matter of law (Mitchell, 1997, 2003; Ruppert, 2006; Blomley, 2009), or, at least,

nowhere to be around sites of capital accumulation. An activist/intellectual anarchist perspective, rather, moves beyond Marxian political economy by way of a commitment to denaturalizing and delegitimizing the role of capitalism as the necessary arbiter of social relations (Call, 2002).

That is, anarchism – and particularly poststructural anarchism – challenges political economy by reading social processes through the lens(es) of culture(s) rather than capital. In this framework, I argue the urge to dominate has it that the local state and the shelterplex are more concerned with determining what the categorization of "homeless" means, determines what the homeless need in order to be "improved" from the state of homelessness and then from those determinations acts upon the bodies of homeless people in specific ways for particular ends. Further, this anarchist reading of the deployments of politicized culture is premised on the framework that "all forms of systemic violence are [...] assaults on the role of imagination as a political principle" (Graeber, 2004, p11). Such a framework opens this project to critical interventions in the linkages of governmentality, discipline and subject-making. Lewis<sup>6</sup>, an activist with Project Aqua traced such a framework in discussing the difference between their ad hoc activities and those of the shelterplex:

[Unlike at the shelters,] you don't have to write five letters to just pass out 10 sandwiches. And also, I like the idea of empowering people, of not branding something. I don't like the proprietary nature of a lot of social movements. It's like, "okay, tomorrow we might want to give out sleeping bags." "Oh, no, we can't, that's not part of our mission statement." I don't like the limitations – it hinders human creativity. And this [ad hoc food provision] demands a lot of flexibility and a lot of creativity (personal comm., July 7, 2012)!

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<sup>6</sup> All names used are pseudonyms - in this project, I use Las Vegas streets as pseudonyms. Names such as "Lewis" or "Bruce" do not infer or imply the gender of a particular research subject.

Flowing from this anarchist framework is a theoretical commitment to tracing the networks and affective politics of solidarity. Such a framework allows for the prying open of systems of dominance tightly woven into spatialities of socialization and emotion-driven politics (Routledge, 2012). Such interventions argue that discourses surrounding how to, in this case, "help the homeless" are the emotional terrains that specifically allow for the local state's "de-mobilization and suppression" (Clough, 2012, p1668) of social networks of mutually-connected individuals trying to make a life for themselves and people they care about<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, this study views the impact of local- and shadow state interventions in and against ad hoc food provision as a nascent urban necropower (Mbembe, 2003). Mbembe's necropower is conceptualized as the inverse of biopower, with the frame of study necessarily being those bodies and populations that fall outside regimes of biopolitical governing. That is, through a necropolitical framework, the regimes and methods of governing are not done in the service of improving lives or otherwise "making live" in certain ways as a matter of statecraft (Foucault, 2008), but rather those forms of governing that make their interest the "maximum destruction of persons and the creation of deathscapes" that render its subjects as the "living dead" (Mbembe, 2002, n.p.) Geographers and other critical scholars have framed and cast necropolitics as an analytical framework to read the "subaltern biopolitical subjectivities" (Driscoll, 2010) in critical race theory (Nast, 2011), the social reproduction of gender (Cowen and Siciliano, 2011) and its surplus (Wright, 2011), (racialized) incarceration (Jackson, 2013) and the

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<sup>7</sup> This will, in turn, connect to my methodological choices in the *Methods* section that follows.

calculability of othered bodies (Giroux, 2007; Rose, 2009; for technology's role, Fleetwood, 2006).

Here, I deploy a necropolitical framework in the failed, interstitial spaces of how the local state and shelterplex define the homeless population and act upon it by way of particular regimes of care. One designation that continually arose in my discussions with activists, local officials and shelter administrators alike was that of "the service resistant homeless." These particular individuals – for a variety of reasons – refuse, through counter-conducts, to submit to the discipline of the shelter system and its associated formalized services. Indeed, local officials and homeless service providers alike explicitly and knowingly conceive of the service resistant as unwilling to engage with shelters and instead rely on rogue, illegal or otherwise ad hoc methods of self-care and preservation that do not meet the approval of government officials or shelterplex administrators. But, at the same time, these agents work to frustrate, discourage and undermine the ability for these unauthorized moments of care and survival to be carried out. Thus, the service resistant living at the very margins of urban social networks are increasingly seeing their networks become thinner and smaller. With the decreased means of aid and survival, death gnaws. It is in this context that I struggles over food sharing not as a biopolitical enterprise meant to improve life through state-centric disciplinary regimes, but rather as a dark necropolitics that seeks to zombify the intransigent homeless, rendering them the living dead of the urban landscape.

### *Study site*

This study is situated in the Las Vegas metropolitan area, home to nearly 2 million ethnically diverse people. Historically, the region has been indelibly marked by periods of intense investment. During the Great Depression, the construction of the Hoover Dam brought an influx of both workers and capital into the Las Vegas area and became one of the city's defining moments (Moehring and Green, 2005). Federal investments continued to flow into the region during World War II, as Las Vegas was the site of a burgeoning martial economy of ammunition plants and military bases. The industrial town of Basic (now Henderson, a relatively affluent suburb of Las Vegas) comprised the bulk of wartime munitions plants, and after the war, the town was offered for sale as surplus war property by the US War Asset Administration (Lyle, 2008). In the aftermath of WWII, atomic testing combined the paranoia of the Cold War with the nascent economy of spectacle being perfected by the city's nascent casino industry.

During the 1970s, the city's Jim Crow legacy of racial exclusion and the increasing economic colonization of the low-wage gambling industry culminated in a numerous large protests of anti-welfare politicians, with major disruptions to resorts and traffic on the Strip (Orleck, 2005). Nearly a decade later, in the early 1980s, a series of disasters at Strip resorts killed scores of tourists and, coupled with a broader economic recession, led to a decline in the tourist economy. However, the 1989 opening of the Mirage signaled a new wave of capital investment in spectacular new mega-resorts on the Strip, leading to a resurgence in tourism. More recently, the data and telecommunications demands of the Global War on Terror, casino-industry surveillance and profiling and drone operations at Creech Air Force Base (Zucchini, 2010) have created a small but

growing data storage, mining and relational analysis sector in the local economy (Nakashima, 2007).

Las Vegas' recent history is marked by intense boom and bust cycles, exacerbated by the particular makeup of the workforce; nearly one-third of the region's jobs are in the Leisure and Hospitality sector (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). From the late 1980's through the early 2000's, Las Vegas was among the fastest growing cities in the United States; however, the foreclosure crisis and the Great Recession hit harder in Las Vegas than in many US cities, resulting in a marked stabilization in population growth (US Census Bureau, 2012).

While known as an "anything goes" city mythologized through architectures of grandiosity and profligacy on the Strip (Schmid, 2012; for "official" boosterism, see Goodman, 2013), poverty, indebtedness, poor educational outcomes, racism and homelessness bedevil Las Vegas's more mundane neighborhoods (Gottdiener, et al, 1999; McKee, 2013). Beyond the foreclosure crisis, many public officials and homeless service administrators I talked to brought up the poor educational system in Nevada as a proxy measurement for the broader "quality of life" in Las Vegas. Indeed, education in Nevada is in a depressed state. Nevada has the third lowest graduation rate in the US (Takahashi, 2013), with Clark County – where nearly all county residents live in the Las Vegas metro area – has one of the worst graduation rates in the state. (Ryan, 2013) The scale of the homelessness crisis in Las Vegas is also particularly striking: as of 2009, nearly 14,000 people in the Las Vegas metropolitan area were homeless (Bosshart, 2009). The *2011 Southern Nevada Homeless Census's* point-in-time street count of homeless individuals



tallied 9,432 homeless persons on the streets of Clark County<sup>8</sup> on a given day, and extrapolated that count to calculate that 43,294 Clark County residents are homeless at any point during the year (Applied Survey Research, 2011). Although there was a 29% decrease in the counted homeless population from 2009 to 2011 (a curious finding given the state of the local and national economy), it is noteworthy that in the same time period, the Census indicates a 40% increase in the number of unsheltered<sup>9</sup> individuals.

The spatial pattern of homelessness underwent dramatic and uneven shifts within Clark County; in the same time period, the number of homeless persons in the City of Las Vegas increased 121%, and the number of homeless persons in the City of North Las Vegas had increased 224% (Applied Survey Research, 2011). The National Alliance to End Homelessness finds that Las Vegas has the fourth highest rate of homelessness in the United States (Tavares, 2010).

FNBLV picnics are routinely held in Baker Park in the City of Las Vegas. Located a couple miles from the center of downtown Las Vegas on St Louis Avenue, Baker Park is a rather mundane inner city park located in a working class neighborhood. Baker Park's particular location on St Louis Avenue symbolizes the neighborhood's role in the regional economy; the Stratosphere Hotel – the only large, Strip-style resort in the City of Las Vegas – is located down St Louis Avenue about a mile from the park. A few hundred feet to the east is the Avenue's intersection with Maryland Parkway, a major

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<sup>8</sup> Clark County, Nevada contains the entire Las Vegas metropolitan area.

<sup>9</sup> Defined in the *Census* as “those homeless persons who are living on the streets or in vehicles, encampments, abandoned buildings, unconverted garages, storage structures, or any other place unfit for human habitation (Applied Survey Research, 2011, p104).” This would not include those homeless persons living at shelters such as Catholic Charities or the Salvation Army, who were counted elsewhere in the *Census*.

north-south arterial. This intersection marks a strip of intense (yet typical) urban commercial development: commercial centers anchored by supermarkets, national chain retailers, convenience stores, chicken restaurants, cell phone stores, gas stations, dollar stores, strip malls and the like. The park itself was – in the earlier stages of my fieldwork – rather neglected. A gazebo provided shade and picnic tables, a small playground area attracted the occasional family to the park, and left-for dead soccer fields comprised most of the space of the park. A service building shared with an adjacent school offered restroom facilities, but those were closed during the course of my time in Las Vegas. Ultimately, the soccer fields were reclaimed, irrigated and fenced off. Incidentally, the gazebo was fenced to be inside the soccer field area, ostensibly for the benefit of soccer leagues.



Fig 1.2: Food sharing sites in Las Vegas, in the context of sites of capital accumulation and leisure (photo courtesy of Las Vegas Tourism Bureau)

Project Aqua, on the other hand, was more spatially flexible. Their activities were carried out in multiple places within two particular neighborhoods. The first was in and near the city's "Homeless Corridor" area – also known by locals as Skid Row. This area is located a couple miles north of downtown Las Vegas and is predominantly populated by the city's largest homeless and emergency shelters, located on or off of Foremaster Lane

between Main and North Las Vegas Boulevard. The only other business on Foremaster is a large funeral home. Similarly, a cemetery rests on the stretch of Foremaster across Las Vegas Boulevard.

Their other base of operations is throughout the West Las Vegas neighborhood. This neighborhood is the historic center of the black and African American population of Las Vegas, and is marked by significant and lasting economic retrenchment. The eastern and southern edges of the neighborhood, nestled against walled-off Interstate highways, play fleeting, repeating host to homeless encampments. In a couple different instances when disseminating water and food and sunscreen with PA, hungry and thirsty individuals would come out of abandoned homes without running water or electricity. The neighborhood's two parks – James Gay and Ethel Pearson Park – are surrounded by wrought iron fences and have been designated as children-and-parent-only parks. This edict is routinely defied, especially in James Gay Park. PA was especially welcome at James Gay Park; it contained a drinking fountain, but issued hot water (the fountain is not under a shade tree) of dubious quality that no one at the park wanted to drink.

The Paiute Indian reservation sits immediately south of the Homeless Corridor; the small urban reservation's most prominent feature is its Tribal Smoke Shop, "the largest single retailer of cigarettes in the United States, and one of the top-ten non-gaming businesses in Nevada" (Paiute Tribe, n.d.). The Homeless Corridor occupies a space on multiple margins of Las Vegas; socially, economically and geographically. The Corridor straddles the border of the City of Las Vegas and the City of North Las Vegas. North Las Vegas is a relatively impoverished suburb with perceptions of high crime and marked by a higher number of foreclosures than other parts of the metro area.

Additionally, it has narrowly avoided municipal bankruptcy in the last few budget cycles. One way the city avoided bankruptcy was to close city jails and transfer prisoners to the Clark County Detention Center in downtown Las Vegas. A city council proposal to slash its police force was met by anger from local residents and prompted the police union to erect a series of chilling billboards near the borders of the city (*Fig. 1.3*).



Fig 1.3: Budget crisis – not just for the central city. (Photo: Steve Marcus, *Las Vegas Weekly*, 2011)

It is within this context of Las Vegas that the arrest of Gail Sacco occurred. It is also in this context that regulations, castigations and instigations of food sharing (by government officials, shadow-state and shelterplex administrators and ad hoc activists, respectively) are conceptualized, discursively produced and carried out. And, finally, it is within this even broader context that I ask the following three research questions:

1. *Why is food sharing under attack, and through what logic does the local state delineate the “do's and don'ts” of helping the hungry?*
2. *Through their food-based activism, what precisely is Food Not Bombs's Las Vegas chapter (FNBLV) trying to say about urban food politics – and space – in Las Vegas?*
3. *Why has there been additional emphasis on moving from attacking “the homeless” to attacking those who would feed the homeless? What does it mean when the local state and the shelterplex take to warning, harassing and frustrating the ad hoc feeding of homeless individuals all while failing to offer relevant care for the service resistant?*

In the brief sections that follow, I will outline the methodologies used to intervene in the above questions and will then provide a brief cartography the dissertation's discussion of these questions by way of its three papers.

### *Methods*

To allow for a deep reading of the practices and geographies of food sharing and ad hoc food provision in Las Vegas, I spent 5 months in the city between March and August of 2012. The greatest portion of my time in the field was spent engaging in participant observation with FNBLV and PA. Following Yin (2009), this was a key method for the project, as it allowed for the collection of data from the vantage point of someone “inside” - Yin uses quotes – the case being studied (p112). He also says that a key strength of participant observation is that through this method, the researcher has the ability “to manipulate minor events [...] not as precise as those in experiments, but they can produce a greater variety of situations *for the purpose of collecting data* (p112, emphasis mine). This can be problematic, as participant observation is, after all, the

practice of bounding a field and determining which subjects are inside the field (Katz, 1994), being an outside intellectual that enters the field, does some things and asks some questions (but doesn't do or ask others), manipulates subjects to see the effects, leaves, analyzes, theorizes, then presents "findings" according to some theoretical logic. This can devolve into "an authoritarian urge to speak for others" (Barnes and Duncan, 1992, p251) and uses people for the purpose of creating a robust and interesting research project.

Taking this broad critique to heart, I was mindful to practice my research methods in the spirit of collaboration and solidarity with my so-called subjects. The appropriateness of collaborative methodologies for geographers in that such a methodology opens a space where a researcher can "integrate theory, politics, and ethics" (Routledge, 1991, p116). And while critical theories can be broadcast in seminars and journals, they can "just as readily and significantly [...] offer material engagement" with people and spaces outside of the academy as well as a way for those inside the academe to reclaim reality by living it instead of having it serve only in the abstract as an object for study (Routledge, 1991, p116). That is, collaborative methods can weaken the categories of researcher and researched. This connects to this project's broader commitments of charting the ways in which an activist group blurs the distinctions between "homeless" and "citizen." Such collaborations can also hollow out the dominant ideology of the academe, where "reality" is known as an analysis of meaning, not directly, actively practiced as a task (Bauman, 1992, in Routledge, 2001, p115).

In this project, such direct, active methods included procuring and preparing food to bring to FNBLV's weekly picnics, and PA's weekly disseminations of water and food, helping to publicize FNBLV's work by "tabling" at several regular Las Vegas events,



participating in and strategizing in periodic organizational meetings, and helping produce an informational flyer to publicize FNBLV's work (see Appendix B).

I would like to briefly return to and make one final point regarding anarchism, the tracing of social networks and the broader framework of violence as an anti-imaginary. These framings coalesce in the collaborative ethnography I did with FNBLV and PA for five months in Las Vegas. Graeber (2004) proposes ethnography as an explicitly anarchist methodology, so long as it is done carefully and in ways that "self-consciously" reject "any trace of vanguardism" (p10). That is, in launching this project<sup>10</sup> through an anarchist framework while engaging in care(-)ful ethnography, a (very rough, Graeber qualifies) model of "nonvanguardist intellectual practice" can arise:

When one carries out an ethnography, one observes what people do, and then tries to tease out the hidden symbolic, moral, or pragmatic logics that underlie their actions; one tries to get at the way people's habits and actions makes sense in ways that they are not themselves completely aware of. One obvious role for a radical intellectual is to do precisely that: to look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities—as gifts (Graeber, 2004, p10).

Over the course of collaborative participant observation with FNBLV and PA, I engaged in hundreds of informal, fleeting conversations with activists and people on the streets alike. These were invaluable for providing context and clarification for the 24 formal interviews I conducted with activists, government officials and shelter administrators. These interviews, in turn, allowed for the "conflicts, interconnections, anxieties, and specificities" between, among, and through actors to emerge (Duncan and Duncan, 2001, p401).

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<sup>10</sup> The ultimate irony, though, is the process and product of The Dissertation is structured to actively subvert any practice of nonvanguardist intellectualism.



More precisely, of the 24 interviews, 11 were conducted in the ad hoc food sharing activist community this dissertation focuses on. These interviews were invaluable, as they informed an analysis of the motivations, techniques and ethico-political underpinnings of food sharing. In addition, 5 interviews were done<sup>11</sup> with the shelterplex administration in Las Vegas. These interviews focused on individuals at the management level of Las Vegas emergency shelters, and served to uncover the discourses and constructions of homelessness and how narratives of front-line service provision are constructed, articulated and deployed. Finally, 8 interviews were done with local government officials directly charged with crafting or administering homeless policy and service in various municipalities and multiple scales throughout Las Vegas. These interviews were vital toward launching an informed, detailed analysis of how local gatekeepers articulate, understand and act upon homelessness in Las Vegas.

All formal interviews were semi-structured and were carried out in multiple sites throughout Las Vegas. Interviews of activists lasted between 1 and 2 hours; interviews with remaining actors lasted from 1 to 1.5 hours. Most interviews with activists were carried out either in local coffeeshops or at activists' homes. One interview was done at Baker Park during a picnic, with the enhancement of an interested audience. Another was done at a downtown bar. Interviews with government officials and shelterplex administrators were almost unanimously done at research subjects' offices. All interviews - save for those with shelter administrators - were audiorecorded<sup>12</sup> and transcribed.

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<sup>11</sup> Shelterplex administrators were widespread in their reluctance to be interviewed for this project, either outright declining, or repeatedly ignoring my numerous attempts - email, phone, and drop-in visits - to contact them.

<sup>12</sup> Shelter administrators systematically declined to be recorded. As one administrator reassured me, vocally emphasizing a deference to bureaucracy: "No offense. It's just, you know, *for the organization.*"

In addition to collaborative activism and interviews, I also attended official meetings germane to the crafting and administration of homeless service policy and practice across the Las Vegas area. This included meetings of homeless service providers, the City of Las Vegas Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission, and homeless policy meetings, such as the Southern Nevada Regional Planning Coalition's Committee on Homelessness. Additionally, I engaged in document analysis to enrich the experiences of observation and interview. This analysis was limited to the governmental and homeless services sector, and included brochures and promotional material, departmental reports, policy documents and administrative materials, such as a list of questions asked during one shelter's intake process.

### *Chapter outlines*

This dissertation is comprised of three main chapters, all informed and enriched by the above research questions, theoretical frameworks, and methodological commitments. In the first paper (Chapter 2: *"What Happens in Vegas....": Las Vegas and the Political Context of Food Sharing*), I provide a reading of why food sharing is under attack or otherwise scrutinized by key actors in the local state and shelterplex. I also trace the discursive formations of so-called correct notions of care and place those notions in relation to conceptualizations of ad hoc food sharing. In this chapter, I argue the local state moves to regulate and frustrate ad hoc food sharing activities not because of a threat to spaces of capital accumulation these activities might cause, but from a nuanced discourse of programmatic and technocratic moralism.

That is, on one hand, appeals to ad hoc food sharers and care-givers is reconceptualized as failing to properly and definitively improve the lives of homeless individuals; handing out sandwiches in city parks, the discourse goes, will only enable self-destructive behaviors. On the other hand, local officials deftly equate ad hoc care giving as lacking the requisite expertise, and as such, is *dangerous* to the health and safety of the homeless individuals ad hoc food providers aim to help. I argue that these "softer" techniques of moral persuasion are premised to move beyond blatant uses of force and instead to insert the local state into the microspaces of moral and ethical calculations in ways that foreclose upon the ability for caring people to help others in ways that do not require the calculations of discipline inherent to charity and shelter life.

At the same time, I find there is widespread recognition that ad hoc methods of care routinely meet the needs of intransigent bodies – termed by local officials and shelterplex administrators as the service resistant – which, in turn, implies a certain degree of failure in the disciplinary regimes of biopower extended by government and shelter alike. That is, some homeless individuals – for myriad reasons – do not want to make use of shelters and services. I provide an account and an analysis of these discourses of service resistance here, but will offer a fuller consideration and analysis of the *effects* of this discourse in Chapter 4, *The Necropolitical Moment*.

In Chapter 3 ("*I Just Don't Know Why They Don't Understand We're Alive!*" *Food Sharing and the Assembly of Space in Las Vegas*), I provide an ethnography of FNBLV (and to a lesser extent, Project Aqua) that maps what FNBLV and PA are trying to say about both urban food politics and space in Las Vegas. Through a collaborative ethnography and shared participation in activism, the particular motivations to enacting

care and productions of social networks that confront and breach the biopolitical come into focus. In this chapter, I argue that the particular commitment to anarchist action informs the particular ways that FNBLV and Project Aqua practice care for others on the streets of Las Vegas.

More precisely, their anarchist framework of practicing non-hierarchical social relations leads to a concomitant commitment to create safe spaces in city parks and sidewalks. These safe spaces, in turn, are the grounds upon which friendship and the erasure of forced categorizations that delineate individuals into (in the case of this dissertation) binaried camps of homeless/citizen. At the same time, FNBLV engages in a broader set of spatial practices, premised less on antagonistic struggles - that is, a politics given meaning through the delineation of determining friends and enemies and struggling against that enemy (The Free Association, 2010) - but instead on agonistic concerns of making hunger visible in ways that allow for the hungry to receive and participate in relations of care without stigmatization. That is, the politics of agonism are a commitment to enacting and testifying a given truth (Cadman, 2010), intervening on that basis in people's lives so as to make a positive difference (Brown, 1997). These agonistic politics, then, are less concerned with marking friends and enemies and struggling against that enemy, but rather is concerned with practicing care and solidarity in the interest of making a positive difference in others' lives. In particular, and extending these agonistic politics, I argue that the enactment of FNBLV food sharing picnics offer fleeting micro-moments where the erasure of population and the abandonment of disciplinary logics offer the possibility of radical new worlds.

Finally, in Chapter 4 (*The Necropolitical Moment*), I analyze the effects of the discursive construction of the so-called service resistant as provided in Chapter 2. More precisely, I examine why there has been a broadening of tactics by the local state from assaulting homeless people's right to be in particular spaces of the city to a more expansive regulation of those who would ally themselves with and care for homeless individuals. I also trace what kinds of political and power relations circulate in the context of the local state and shelterplex's failures to provide relevant and meaningful forms of aid to particular homeless individuals while simultaneously attempting to short-circuit or otherwise stop the ability for ad hoc volunteers to practice the sorts of care that the service resistant will accept.

In this chapter, I argue that the failure of biopolitical regimes of discipline, coupled with the active ways that food sharing and other forms of ad hoc care are foreclosed upon signal a nascent urban necropolitics on the streets of Las Vegas. This constitutes, I argue, a politics that renders the intransigent service resistant as outside the purview of biopolitical care (not for lack of trying), but not outside the power relations of dominance and death wielded by the state.

## CHAPTER 2: “WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS...:” LAS VEGAS AND THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF FOOD SHARING

How do we understand assaults on food sharing? What do these attacks tell us about governance, state power and urban space? As discussed in the introduction, this chapter addresses three central research questions. First, I ask why food sharing is a contentious issue in Las Vegas and how and why the local state takes such an interest in encouraging what they view as the correct types of care and aid of homeless individuals. From this, I turn attention to the work of ad hoc food activists and interrogate how their acts of food sharing constitute a move toward a spatial strategy of assembling actors in space and the redrawing (or perhaps erasing) of power relations between local officials, homeless individuals and the administrators of the local shelterplex<sup>13</sup>. Finally, I pose the additional question of why local state attention has shifted from revanchist removals of homeless individuals to a strategy of frustrating those that would help or aid homeless individuals.

Interrogating why food sharing is under attack – the focus of this chapter – facilitates an understanding of the decisions of local governance and its relation to the administration of "traditional" homeless services. As these relations take place in the particular spaces of Las Vegas, this chapter is delineated into two parts. First, I will provide a survey of the city itself in order to put this case study in to a specific urban

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<sup>13</sup> Whereas the "shadow state" refers to the connections of non-state voluntary organizations to the public sector (Wolch, 1990), I use the term "shelterplex" to describe the networks of voluntary and nonprofit organizations' connections to the large emergency shelters of Las Vegas. That is, the geographies and networks of homeless service provision are not just state-to-voluntary-sector, but also voluntary-sector-to-shelter or nonprofit sector-to-local state (see Trudeau, 2008). For instance, volunteers attached to a large Las Vegas food bank are routinely encouraged by the bank to volunteer at a particular downtown shelter, who also receives large amounts of food from the food bank. This is also an admittedly artistic intervention, as "shelterplex" more readily captures the primacy of the shelter - and not so much the state - as the institutionalizing force in the lives of service-resistant homeless individuals.

context. In both form and function, Las Vegas is oft-conceived of as a fantastic global hub of postmodern capitalism and culture, where the image and signification of wealth, consumption and the unbridled (yet tightly bounded) satisfaction of desire frame an urban mythology of Las Vegas centered around individual exploits in a spirit of "anything goes." Nonetheless, there is little geographic literature specifically questioning Las Vegas. As such, I first review the existing (albeit small) geographic literature on Las Vegas. In taking this tack, this chapter provides a starting point that sets both context and conversation with emerging literatures that challenge traditional notions that "the city," affect, "the" homeless and policy are discrete categories (Lancione, 2013).

This chapter's other concern is local governance's claims on both space and action in Las Vegas. As it relates to ad hoc, street-side food sharing in Las Vegas, those that would make policy and govern have a number of choices. Local officials can choose a *laissez-faire* attitude about public food sharing, can provide various degrees of support to food sharing activities or they can actively resist and frustrate it. In Las Vegas, the city had initially chosen the latter in all cases, shifting more recently to the second in varying degrees and at different times for particular constituencies of "feeders"<sup>14</sup>. For instance, the work of FNBLV and Project Aqua is heavily problematized by the same local officials who organize city-sanctioned events where faith-based ad hoc groups can do "feedings."

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<sup>14</sup> Chapter 3 will present a detailed discussion of the implications of viewing the giving of food to others as "feeding" versus "sharing." I place feeding in quotes here to bring attention to the problematic conceptualization of the term, which among other things, connotes the act of adults feeding babies or children, or people feeding animals. *Sharing*, and the connotations the word carries, is purposefully used by FNBLV members to describe the act of aiding homeless individuals.

In this chapter, I make a number of arguments. First, I argue that the spatiality of the struggles over ad hoc food sharing in Las Vegas suggest that the local state's primary motivation is not revanchist protection of capital accumulation. Instead, I read the Las Vegas case as one of a local state engaging in a struggle to define homeless individuals in particular ways and to solidify the legitimacy of state-sanctioned help as the way to improve the lives of homeless individuals.

Flowing from this, I further argue that a key driver in the local state's disruptions of ad hoc care is the categorization of recipients of ad hoc care as service resistant homeless individuals. While formulations of ad hoc care are held as shoddy, careless and dangerous, the category of service resistance is similarly tied to failure, with service resistant subjects conceived of as uninformed about the state-sanctioned help awaiting them and as intransigent or mentally-ill actors. That is, while there is a seeming contradiction between neoliberalism's doctrines of devolution and the local practice of stopping ad hoc food sharing, the city's actions to prevent such aid to homeless individuals is premised more along lines of moral superiority than devolutionary, libertarian proclivity. Local government and the shelterplex deploys this in two ways. First, a sort of technico-moralism holds rogue, ad hoc acts of care as shoddy and dangerous to the homeless. These machinations are then, in turn, embedded in regulations used to discourage so-called feeders from giving food to homeless individuals. Secondly, bare-fisted and emotional appeals to the "common sense" prescription of what the homeless *really* need were routinely voiced by local officials and shelterplex administrators: submission to various social hierarchies and a temporally-structured life.



Related to this process is that responses to food sharing launched by the local state and the shelterplex are shaped through a territory of frustration. This frustrated spatiality is mapped by local officials who, on one hand, view the shelters as potentially unsafe and dangerous. On the other hand, the role of the shelter was described by one shelterplex administrator as enabling homelessness by way of shelter services making life easier. From this frustrated ambivalence, local officials and shelterplex administrators then describe the practices of ad hoc aid as being *more* dangerous than those of the shelter; for instance, an oft-repeated trope contends that ad hoc food preparation is unclean and unsanitary and presents a danger to the health of those living on the streets.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Struggles over food sharing in Las Vegas are highly spatialized. However, efforts to prevent food sharing are not primarily occurring in the tourist or development districts of Downtown Las Vegas or the Strip (see Fig 2.1 below). Rather, they occur in relatively obscure areas north of downtown (an area having a high concentration of homeless shelters) or in quotidian working-class neighborhoods well off the Strip. Therefore, Las Vegas presents a unique and valuable case study, as research in geography privileges an analysis of these clashes as the result of regulations that operate in relation to sites of capital accumulation, including processes of gentrification, redevelopment and profit-generating events (MacLeod, 2002).

There are moments in which the role and place of capital accumulation figures strongly in the conflicts over food sharing. Food Not Bombs, in particular, was a constant

thorn in the side of the police in Smith's (1996) "revanchist city" around New York City's rapidly gentrifying Tompkins Square. During the 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, FNB was tear gassed by riot police at their highly-visible soup-ladling stand in the downtown "Green Zone" of anti-capitalist protest (Graeber, 2009). More recently, during June and July 2011, at least 28 people have been arrested for sharing food at FNB picnics in Orlando's signature downtown park, Lake Eola Park (Schlueb, 2011).

Such a revanchist city was theorized by Smith (1996) as based on two impulses: the political economy of gentrification and the affective deployment of scapegoating vengeance. More specifically, Smith's (1996) revanchism is operationalized as "taking back" the spaces of the city seen as attractive for enhanced development and capital accumulation from the multitudes of the unwashed (typically homeless individuals) who are charged by economic elites as having perpetrated the "theft" of the city from the formerly privileged (p207). However, the Las Vegas case of interventions in homeless people's geographies *vis-à-vis* the struggles over food sharing are occurring in more mundane urban spaces, and this spurs the asking of a different set of questions and the application of theoretical treatments to the politics of urban homelessness that do not take revanchism for granted.



Fig 2.1: Spaces of capital accumulation and food sharing in Las Vegas. (Map courtesy of Las Vegas Tourism Bureau)

It is perhaps clear and intuitive from a political economy point of view why crackdowns on street-feeding and food sharing occurring in visible, contested spaces might be a matter for policymakers' attention. Among local officials, traditional understandings conceptualize the homeless as visible signs of trouble, usually in areas that are being marketed as desirable. Moreover, the presence of visible homelessness in conspicuous urban spaces serves as a visible reminder of severe and entrenched inequalities; the

unwelcome bodies of the homeless also foster perceptions of need and dysfunction that local growth coalitions (Leitner, 1992; Jessop, 1997; Cox, 1999) and police (Wilson and Kelling, 1982) seek to vanquish – not by addressing problems of economic distribution, but rather by removing homeless individuals and their allies from view. From this, the literature has taken a decidedly “us versus them” conception of urban homeless politics. Theoretically, the fixation on and the framing of urban homelessness solely as *antagonistic* politics of “the city” versus “the homeless” creates a binaried relationship between homeless individuals and the public and naturalizes the separateness of “the homeless” from “the city” (Lancione, 2013) These binaries serve as a way to process homeless people as Others while denying that homeless individuals actively formulate their own messy and entangled relations with and within the city.

But, the Las Vegas case I trace here doesn't occur in downtown areas or adjacent to a convention center or other site of intense capital accumulation. Instead, they play out in relatively sleepy, spatially marginal neighborhood parks – not to mention the warning of sandwich-bearing do-gooders in Las Vegas's isolated Skid Row (see Figure 2.1) – in ways that present a challenge to this traditional framing. The local state is taking a new, novel tack: *it is not the homeless themselves* that are being regulated *per se*, but rather those that would provide aid to the hungry that are bearing the cost of increased government scrutiny. From this juncture, I argue that the spaces of *agonistic* politics of care and the ways these politics assemble space and sociality are largely overlooked by the revanchist theorization. While the revanchist framework privileges the antagonistic struggles of capital versus (some of) its citizens (with politics as the deployment of war against an identified enemy), the agonism of food sharing traces a commitment to

productive action deployed to improve the lives of others through intervention; the responses to this intervention uncover particular motives on the part of the state that do not suggest an undying commitment to protecting capital accumulation first, last and always.

In fact, my research and the Las Vegas case it is situated in will show that while the revanchist tactics of eviction and removal are tools used by the local state, increasing energy is being directed to combating rogue acts of aid and to frustrating homeless peoples' allies. That is, the duty of governing is not only about determining where certain people may be, but increasingly about how actors may situate themselves in relation to others and how acts of care, aid and reciprocity can play out in public. In Chapter 4, I will conceptualize this expansion of governance as a dark, nascent urban necropolitics.

Indeed, this argument resonates with other challenges to other geographers theorizations of urban homelessness in relation to revanchist gentrifiers and pro-development city governments seeking to taking back urban spaces from the homeless (see, for example, DeVerteuil, 2006; DeVerteuil, May, von Mahs, 2009). Ultimately, I argue that conceptions of violence done to homeless individuals need to be sharpened in ways that question the project of governance in totality, not just in the context of its neoliberalized constituent parts. With this chapter as the starting point, this dissertation is one that features the work of discipline as the conceptual underpinning of how various homelessneses are understood and moved upon by government.

The analytical distinction between “revanchism” and “discipline” is important, and a fuller reading of the underlying notions of governance is warranted. Specifically, I draw from Johnsen and Fitzpatrick's (2010) critique, which rests on the notion that he

underpinning frameworks of revanchism are limited in theorizing the productive role of the state and its mechanisms of governing of the poor. As a point of departure, they cite multiple instances in which various counterweights to punitive revanchism appeared in the form of *expanded* social welfare policies – “shelters in particular” (p3) that sought to care for and give (“proper”) help to the homeless. There is an element of compassion – even when coerced, the authors argue – that underlies activities of street clearing. This critique also makes the distinction that it is not the *sight* of homeless persons that initiates anti-homeless laws, but rather laws are passed when homeless persons are “in the way” (p16).

It is in rare instances that care can be coerced while retaining its benevolence. Whether it is the forced clearing of a homeless camp or a foreclosing upon the availability of ad hoc sources of food and nourishment, assaults of persons deemed to be in the way are often – and certainly in Las Vegas – rationalized as an attempt to get homeless individuals to engage with needed services. Following Johnsen and Fitzpatrick's critique of revanchism-centric readings of (anti-)homeless policy, this project will be cautious in considering the articulation, role and vision of “care” in the work of FNBLV, the shadow state of nonprofit homeless shelters, and the governing local state alike. In particular, this chapter will focus on the latter two. This project is concerned with understanding how conflicting notions of “care” might be responsible for the particular (micro-)local state interventions against particular forms of food provision.

All this apparent care notwithstanding, the local and shadow-state officials I spoke to didn't conceptualize homeless individuals in the same way that the punitive-forward literature does. It is a convincing critique that weaknesses in the existing literature

emerge from conceptualizations of the homeless as a monolithic category and that more attention should be given to the ways that the *particular* homeless subgroups are acted upon and are able to resist policies directed at them (DeVerteuil, Marr, Snow, 2009). Additional layers of critique hold that homeless individuals are not a discrete category of people separated from the city, and as such do not *only* perform the city or *only* be subjected to it (Lancione, 2013). Rather, Lancione argues a more fitting theorization finds homeless individuals as co-constituting and co-affecting the spaces and social relations in and of the city. As I expand upon in the next chapter, such co-constitutions conjure the workings of (small scale) militant particularisms "arising out of the experience of class solidarities" (Harvey, 2001 p 176) flowing from the affective spaces of Las Vegas parks and sidewalks and subaltern spaces in ways that speak truth to broader issues (Featherstone, 2005).

In Las Vegas, notions and practices of caring work in particular ways, in particular places and for the benefit of particular homeless people in ways that intersect with and reinforce notions of gender, race and class and assumptions about the deserving and undeserving poor. Where certain politics are launched on behalf of homeless, elderly widowers or veterans, a wholly different calculation is made as it relates to prescribing the needs of, say, a homeless sex worker or a so-called shiftless wino or a black-clad squeegee punk. In particular, notions of those termed as service resistant – those intransigent homeless persons who refuse engaging with traditional homeless services – are met by the local state with harder tactics meant to coerce these individuals off the streets. Here, the resistance launched by some homeless individuals to avoid the

shelterplex both instigates and is influenced by politics of revanchism directed more toward the service resistant specifically, not bluntly to "the" homeless broadly.

Of course, the service resistant either won't or can't leave the streets. They do not want to go into the shelters and they lack the resources for permanent housing, at least as far as bourgeois conceptions of permanent housing go. Although the local officials I talked to repeated the assertion that homelessness cannot be solved with what they called a one-size-fits-all approach, they also did not express a programmatic imagination that moved beyond the shelter. The vexing case of the so-called service resistant has instead increased the primacy of the shelter. For instance, a group of officials at one municipality repeatedly discussed a large homeless services "campus"-cum-shelter in downtown Phoenix as a model their municipality should adopt.

This so-called campus would offer enhanced services and more case workers to process homeless individuals and pair them with appropriate channels of state care. But, absent the enhanced shelter, the ways local government intervenes in the lives of the service resistant are through a series of coercions: ceaselessly dismantling homeless encampments, closing publicly accessible restrooms and frustrating or subverting ad hoc food sharing groups. These are formulated specifically to frustrate the intransigent homeless' ability to practice self-care and self-reliance, while also making life on the streets more dangerous and more susceptible to an early grave than would otherwise be the case.



### **The city: Abstractions and embodiments**

Las Vegas is a quintessentially postmodern city (Davis, 2002; Baudrillard, 1989). Prior to the economic crash of 2008, the economic driver of the region is the mythology that Las Vegas defines the outside of the present urban experience – a destination that is marketed as a place one must go to see and *not* believe and as a place to escape to and let it “all hang out” in ways that “can't” be done “back home.” Further, popular critiques of the political economy of Vegas read the city solely as the Strip. This framing privileges superficial critiques of Las Vegas as merely the material expression of the symbolic and unreal. While cultural critiques broadly declare Las Vegas as a global symbol of postmodern capitalism, there is little geographic literature that pulls apart the myriad strands and micropowers of “*actually existing*” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) life in Las Vegas.

Starting from the abstract and conceptual, Schmid (2006) situates Las Vegas as a global hub of the “economy of fascination.” In this formulation, economic growth is realized through the construction of elaborate dreamscapes to seduce the masses. Indeed, while Vegas is the post-modern “outside” of the “normal” urban experience, it has also normalized the spectacle-as-urban-development. As Schmid notes, more staid cities such as Cleveland and Detroit have recently pinned downtown re-development regimes to “Vegas-style” casino and entertainment districts.

Although “Vegas-style” entertainment is premised on what is happening in Vegas staying in Vegas, surveillance and data flows connect the city and its visitors in myriad ways. Every transaction in the city's resorts are meticulously recorded; the mundane act

of registering for a hotel room in Vegas creates a data flow (the registrant's name, address, phone number, and so forth) into an expansive database that gleans for relationships between guests, clients, casino players and resort employees and administrators (Nakashima, 2007). These expansive techniques in data mining and relational analysis pioneered in Vegas casinos and resorts have been "borrowed" by the federal government, creating material relations between casino security and national security. These surveillances foreshadow similar commitments to calculation and data flows in the shelters; as one local official noted, "we have to be a more data-driven community, because that's what the federal government wants, and we have to have a *very* sophisticated HMIS<sup>15</sup> system" (personal comm., July 2, 2012, emphasis original). These processes of tracking the movements and identities of homeless individuals belie the construction of a disciplinary city seeking to track and arrange networks and assemblages of homeless individuals in the spaces of the city.

In the more mundane precincts of the city, the opulent displays of superpower – dreams of easy money, sex and genocide (and for the proletariat, by design, all just out of reach) – give way to the deadly micropowers of urban life and zombie capitalism (Peck 2010). For instance, while Las Vegas creates a mythology of openness, universality and a spirit of "anything goes," McKee (2013) provides an ethnography of racism and exclusion as expressed through local debates over the Interstate 15 retaining wall. Separating downtown Las Vegas (particularly the redeveloping area along City Parkway) from the historically segregated African-American neighborhood of West Las Vegas, the

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<sup>15</sup> Homeless Management Information System

I-15 wall was a physical expression of Las Vegas's Jim Crow history and served as a contemporary flashpoint on the role of racialization and racism in Las Vegas.

On the other hand, Blumenberg and Ehrenfeucht (2008) argue that the regulation of public space and politics in Las Vegas follows a much broader, corporate logic. Blumenberg and Ehrenfeucht's case study asserts that "perhaps nowhere" (p304) has the regulation of public space – and in particular, sidewalks – been so deeply practiced than along the Las Vegas Strip. The case of the Strip, though, relies on an economistic relation between economic growth and regulation. In particular, the Strip resorts' desire to expand the tourist customer base to families lead to increasing regulation of adult pamphlet newsstands and strip club street hawkers. Similarly, the wave of unionization of Strip resorts by the Culinary Workers similarly fomented tight regulations on the issuance of protest and parade permits along Las Vegas Boulevard, ostensibly to make it more difficult to organize work actions.

On the Strip, local government has placed myriad time, place and manner restrictions on activities they did not want to occur but "could not prohibit outright" (Blumenberg and Ehrenfeucht, 2008, p313). These sorts of restrictions were focused primarily on speech-related activities. In particular, Blumenberg and Ehrenfeucht (2008) tie the restrictions to activities engaged in by the Culinary Workers Union, such as picket lines and marches. Culinary 226 is the local chapter of UNITE HERE and claims over 60,000 workers, mostly employed on the Strip. Because of the primacy of Culinary 226 in the Las Vegas labor force, it has the organizational suppleness and savvy to navigate local government conditions on protest and permitting. However, these labyrinthine permitting processes "are more likely to limit the activities of smaller and, perhaps, less

powerful or experienced grassroots lobbying groups" (Blumenberg and Ehrenfeucht, 2008, p314). Specifically in the case of ad hoc food sharers – the focus of this dissertation – the tactics of frustration are similarly used, sometimes very effectively.

Switching to engagements with temporalities and Las Vegas as a built environment, this is also a city that regularly mutilates itself by calculated implosion. While implosions occur to erase the alleged blight of bankruptcy from the Strip, many implosions are reminders that notions of opulence and fun, as well as Vegas symbolism itself, change. For instance, the El Rancho and the Desert Inn were imploded to make way for the “new and improved” (and much, much larger) Fontainebleau and the Wynn Resorts, respectively. Where “real” cities develop real estate in ways that cling to “historic preservation,” Las Vegas opts to implode and replace. The common reading is that this is a “city” without history and one that doesn't have a lasting symbol.

This material critique infuses conceptualizations of the social in Las Vegas in ways that approach the subject of this dissertation. For instance, one not insignificant way of addressing homelessness in Las Vegas is a program a number of local officials mentioned: that of interstate family reunions. Playing on the oft-expressed idea that the gam(bl)ing economy attracts singles to the city<sup>16</sup>, this program buys one-way transportation out of Las Vegas to (re)unite homeless individuals with (verified) family members. Just as the supposed lack of rootedness to the material culture of Las Vegas makes implosions and the spectacular disappearing of physical structures a logical way to address the obsolescence of the built environment, so too does the assumption of a lack of

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<sup>16</sup> And, as one local official bluntly told me about the interstate geographies of homelessness, "...they don't like to admit it," at which point a colleague interjected, "a lot of cities do bus their homeless here" (personal comm., July 19, 2013)

social rootedness further the attractiveness of interventions that erase some homeless individuals from the fabric of the city.

Disposabilities and erasures of bodies in Las Vegas are also linked to the city's especially harsh elements. In one example, Grundstein, Null and Meentemeyer (2011) quantitatively compare rates of vehicle-related hyperthermia deaths in major US metropolitan areas. To be expected, Sun Belt cities such as Las Vegas, Phoenix, Dallas and Houston are particularly deadly cities. However, the authors note that "the rankings change considerably" (p361) when tabulating deaths of children under five year's age. The reasons for these fatalities vary, yet all deploy the language of accident: approximately two-thirds of youths are either "forgotten" about or are "intentionally" left behind. On this last term, the authors are quick to note that "intentionally" refers to a decision to leave a child in a locked car in the desert for "only" a few moments while some sort of errand is being run, not the intentionality of causing a child's death through willful, malign neglect. However, as it relates to broader processes of homelessness, the politics of hyperthermia and the apparent "accident" of death leave out the calculations of service resistance that weigh the perceived dangers of the shelter to the perceived safety of going it alone and the role of regional "cooling stations" that open at temperatures well beyond those that can cause vehicle-related hyperthermia.

The politics of heat play out on the streets of Las Vegas in key ways for homeless individuals - particularly for the service resistant or for those who avoid shelters (such as families). Grundstein, Null and Meentemeyer (2011) note that in deaths attributed to vehicle-related hyperthermia, "[m]ore than 70 percent of deaths occurred when maximum ambient air temperatures exceeded [86 degrees Fahrenheit]" (p363). In other words, an

observed, fixed baseline can be said to reliably result in increased mortality for those left, locked, or living in cars. The desert heat has brutal implications for those that avoid shelters and who, as one local official imagined (which I will return to later), opt for the enhanced security and privacy of living in one's car. Especially for those car-bound homeless with children, the mix of sun, heat, and glass become deadly. At the same time, the Las Vegas region has myriad public buildings, such as libraries, which operate as cooling stations where the public may linger in the air conditioning. However, the level of heat emergency that instigates the opening of cooling stations is triggered at 105 degrees Fahrenheit, nearly 20 degrees hotter than Grundstein, Null and Meentemeyer's implied baseline of mortality.

One activist with Project Aqua, particularly, views "the starkness of the desert" itself as co-constituted with the "psychological design" and material culture of the city (personal comm., July 7, 2012). The interplay of "fountains and opulence" on the Strip are "juxtaposed with scarcity" in the city's neighborhoods in ways that animate her interventions into "the image that people want to hang on to, how they want to brand their city is what we have to dismantle" (personal comm., July 7, 2012). Particularly, this activist problematized the fountain-as-spectacle on the Strip while homeless individuals slowly burn and evaporate in the parched neighborhoods into a broader challenge of the emergency threshold set by Clark County for the opening of cooling stations; as s/he asked me, "105 [degrees]<sup>17</sup> is a bit high, don't you think (personal comm., July 7, 2012)?"

<sup>17</sup> Incidentally, the federal guidelines for "Excessive Heat Events" (EHEs) – developed in part by the Department of Homeland Security – define heat emergencies as the deviation from a seasonal norm. "In other words, Boston, Philadelphia, Miami, Dallas, Chicago, San Diego, and Seattle are likely to have different EHE criteria at any point in the summer to reflect different local standards for unusually hot summertime weather" (Environmental Protection Agency, 2006, p9). In some ways this makes sense; my own body became accustomed to the heat of the desert while in the field. My return to Milwaukee in August left me – literally, and to my partner's seemingly endless amusement – shivering.

Ultimately, this activist hopes that the awareness that conspicuously giving out water in public spaces affords will foment an increased policy push to make *drinking* water fountains as much a valuable public infrastructure as aesthetic water fountains are in the spaces of the Strip (personal comm., July 7, 2012).

Finally, these reflections on desert, sun, policy, programs, intervention and death come back to the shelter. This activist further explained that contacts with the local office of a global disaster response agency further illuminated the primacy of the Skid Row shelters as the center point of Las Vegas's geographies of homelessness:

the [global disaster relief agency's] publicity person, he was very engaging and kind over the phone, but he said based on his agency's stand with regards to thirst and hunger is that [a large Las Vegas shelter] is taking care of it, that [another large Las Vegas shelter]'s taking care of it. That's what they tell the [global disaster relief agency]. So, there's a disconnect there. He says "it's news to me, that you see thirsty people and hungry people, that's news to me." I said, "come on down!" You know? Come on down. That has to change – what they're reporting to the [global agency] and what the [global agency] and what the community designates as an emergency is not really ... effective (personal comm., July 7, 2012)

This recounted exchange draws a very explicit map of the geographies of biopoliticized care in Las Vegas, and the power relations that operate in local the shadow state networks. From this, the large faith-based shelters in Skid Row operate as the fulcrum by which decisions on the dispensation of care and material pivot. A large, resourceful and nimble global agency with a highly prominent presence in Southern Nevada claims ignorant to the level of need that occurs outside the shelter gates because, according to

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On the other hand, there absolute limits to biological functions; as the guidelines themselves declare, "[m]aintaining a consistent internal body temperature, generally 98.6°f, is essential to normal physical functioning (Environmental Protection Agency, 2009, p10).

this activist, interventions into ambient levels of homelessness are seen as proprietary: the shelters "have it covered," so to speak.

Except, they don't. Especially when "cover" is conceived of as shade. As one FNBLV activist mentioned to me, former Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman once tried to force homeowners in and near her neighborhood (where homeless persons would sometimes congregate) cut down their shade trees. However, in Skid Row near the city's largest shelters, this actually happened:

Stumps.

That's what is left of the trees that offered shade in years past on two streets near downtown where hundreds of homeless people still gather.

Their absence was conspicuous as the Las Vegas Valley suffered its sixth straight day of 100-degree heat Wednesday, providing a cruel commentary on life in the streets when it gets hot.

Curiously, one of the two streets – Wilson Avenue, site of a homeless camp with up to 300 people – had its trees cut down during the recent heat wave, though county workers who have been working in the area did not know what agency was responsible for the act.

In any case, the absence of relief for the region's homeless raises a perennial issue for local governments, whose emergency shelter plan for extreme weather conditions was developed in the last two years.

But the plan only considered what low temperatures in winter would set in motion funding for emergency shelter, and set no threshold for high temperatures in summer, said Darryl Martin, director of Clark County Social Service.

"This heat has caught us off guard," he said. (Pratt, 2005)

It is surprising that the heat would catch anyone – let alone a county social services director – "off guard" in the desert.

However, this example foreshadows a broader argument I will make in Chapter 4. This argument emerges from my analysis in this chapter of local state interventions into



homelessness that privilege certain views of homeless people and conceive of their care in biopoliticized regimes deployed by the shadow state of shelters. Then, in Chapter 3, I chronicle the ways that ad hoc caregivers present both resistance to and transcendence of the barriers imposed by the biopolitical in ways that expand homeless individuals' geographies of survival in Las Vegas. Drawing from these examinations, in Chapter 4 (*The Necropolitical Moment*) I then argue that local state attempts to foreclose upon these expansions in homeless individuals' geographies of survival – such as the removal of shade trees above – constitute a politics *beyond* revanchism.

Instead, a nascent urban necropolitics seeks, where the impositions of programmed discipline fail, to make life on the streets *more* deadly. In so doing, the local state marks the intransigent service resistant as a sort of zombified subject: the biopolitical state has pulled away from actively embedding certain homeless persons into regimes of biopolitical improvement, instead opting for a politics that increasingly prevent certain bodies to be improved (either by way of self-care or through networks of solidarity). Rather, increased mortality, disfigurement and death become the only officially-sanctioned avenues for the lives of the service resistant to proceed.

There is a final facet of Las Vegas the geographic literature briefly surveys: religion and spirituality. Beyond the role that large faith-based groups have in the administration of the city's large shelters, more "mundane" and everyday expressions of religiosity are mediated by the particularities of the economic and social life of Las Vegas. For instance, Rowley (2012) recounts the ways in which a local imam negotiates his congregants' work as taxi drivers and the "forbidden" images of scantily clad women

and alcohol plastered on the cabs. Similarly, the challenges of the gam(bl)ing industry mark and redraw the boundaries of faith in novel ways.

As one local rabbi supposes, gambling isn't in itself a morally repulsive act. Other religious leaders concurred in Rowley's ethnography, drawing a nuanced exception that gaming done as entertainment is wholly unproblematic and not at all incompatible with being a church or synagogue or temple member. For instance, Rowley recounts the Mormon temple members that were employed as, among other things, upper management at a large Strip casino. On the other hand, gambling done to the point of sacrificing the paying of bills or rent or necessitating taking on debt or hocking belongings is seen as immoral. As a local orthodox rabbi reasoned: “[w]hen you cross that line and spend money you don’t have or that you can’t afford to lose, then it becomes a problem” (Rowley, 2012 p85). That is to say, the specific formulation of moral logic espoused by the religious leaders of "Sin City" isn't so much that the existence of seductive "sin" and vice is what should be combated, but rather that an individual might try her hand and *lose*.

This connects to the ways local officials talk about the relationship between economic boom times and homelessness. As one homeless service agency director connected them, upon her moving to the city in the early 2000's, policymakers were "having problems getting people to graduate" because of the prevalence of *high*-paying service jobs: one could "get a job parking cars. \$90,000 a year, and call it good" (personal comm., June 25, 2012). She then gave an example of a friend who works for room service at a large Strip resort: "he just graduated with his Bachelors in Public Administration, and everywhere he'd be taking a job, he'd be taking a \$10,000 cut. To

actually get a job in the area he just studied, you know?" (personal comm., June 25, 2012).

However lucrative these service-sector jobs might be, within short order, the Great Recession and the bursting of the housing bubble had significant impacts on Valley residents. These losses in the gamblings in the service economy are, then, turned into the failures of individuals rather than the system of economic life in Las Vegas. For instance, one local official described a youth engagement pamphlet called *Ready for Life* that articulates "our community plan that, it's all evidence-based," that also contends youth who do not connect to work or educational habits by the age of 25 are far more likely "to be involved with the social services system and the law enforcement system is definitely gonna happen" (personal comm., July 2, 2012). From these two exchanges, there is are conflicting readings of the role of the city's particular service economy – a high-wage boon for the low-skilled worker, yet a barrier to educational attainment – but wherever the blame may implicitly lie in these readings, the acutely cyclical nature of the city's tourist-based service economy can have quick and merciless effects on those who decide to gamble on it.

Ultimately, this connects with the moral formulations that crop up in another Las Vegas center of religiosity: the shelterplex. While the religious leaders in Rowley's (2012) ethnography explicitly contend that reliance on charity by the down and out is bad, it is precisely the religious who operate most of the homeless service charities in Las Vegas. On one hand, as it relates to local officials' frustrations with ad hoc food sharing activities, "the church" and conceptions of the religious and spiritual "duty to feed" entered into many of my discussions with local officials (personal comm., July 2, 2012;

July 17, 2012). Incidentally, many government officials voiced a fair amount of frustration that being too aggressive against religious groups' "feeding" activities came close to assaulting religious expression. But on the other hand, regional government's most valued partners in traditional homeless services in the Vegas Valley – the Skid Row shelters and the city's nonprofit industry – largely come from established religious organizations. In either case, the underpinning of a supposedly secular biopolitical regime of caring for homeless bodies in particular ways is, ultimately, infused with certain moralisms.

Of course, these moralisms can be conveniently, materially enriching as well. For example, one faith-based shelter administrator I talked to derided a recent instance of a local Boy Scout troop's sleeping bag drive for "the" homeless of Las Vegas. While supposing that the Scouts' "hearts were in the right place," this wasn't a correct dispensation of care: "I don't want homeless in the streets, I want them in the shelter" (personal comm., July 6, 2013) Later, this administrator illustrated why, glowingly describing one program for the homeless: a "spot jobs" program that provided local resorts and construction firms with low-cost, contingent labor. This individual mentioned that the summer months (current to my time in the field) are the "low water mark" of shelter residents' participation in the program, as the summer is when the "people want to be in the streets – no rules" (personal comm., July 6, 2013).

Incidentally, this shelter charges employers 1.5 times the hourly rate received by the homeless individuals, transforming the shelter into a temporary employment service, while exploiting and deploying certain moralities for profit. While this points to a political economy of homelessness that herds feral bodies into the shelterplex so that they

may be made available to employers as cheap labor, other analyses are possible from this administrator's description of sleeping bags and temp services. This administrator conceives his most basic task not as doing what he can to meet the needs of homeless individuals as they see them. Instead, he decries the way some homeless individuals live their lives, analyzing them as having "no rules," expressed as having escaped from the demands of alarm clocks and employers' time cards.

This mapping of the Las Vegas literature serves to illustrate two points. The first is simply that myriad urban processes and politics do indeed play out in Las Vegas. The city can – and should – be read beyond the glitter and phantasmagoria of the Strip. The second is that the politics of race and exclusion and the negotiations of worldly economy and faithful discipline are richly and deeply imbued into the life of the city and the people who inhabit it. These processes also shape the particular ways in which the people of Las Vegas relate to each other. For instance, both food sharing activists and government officials spoke often of the links between the foreclosure crisis and the "anything goes" culture of Las Vegas as fueling the persistence of homelessness in the city.

However, as I will trace below, the relations between "the" homeless and government policy and charitable administration are tightly circumscribed.

**"I don't want the homeless on the streets – I want them in the shelter:" Making the homeless and putting them in their place**

Two of the management-level administrators of Las Vegas emergency shelters I talked to came into their positions by way of what they called "the corporate world;" one

administrator headed the philanthropic givings of a Fortune-500 corporation headquartered in the Midwest, while another had various positions within the finance industry.

One administrator, Bruce, was driven by two things in his corporate-to-shelterplex career path; the desire to "make a difference," but to do so in an organization that "gets results" (personal comm., July 6, 2012). This administrator continued to talk about the various data collection and intake processes that the shelter initiates upon contact with its "clients"<sup>18</sup>. These efforts also tie into external sources of funding, Bruce explained, in that quantifying need and results have a bearing on winning grant monies. It also enabled talking to people "out in the community" (note the implication that "the homeless" are set outside "the community") about homelessness, and the quantification of needs served to convince prospective volunteers and donors that their help is needed to carry out the shelter's programs.

Another administrator, Maryland, taught youth in the community after being laid off from his private-sector job and "got hooked on that" (personal comm., July 16, 2012). The relationship channels forged through mentoring eventually allowed him to find his way to the large shelter where he is currently employed. In reflecting on his career arc, Maryland added an emphatic "I don't want to turn back" to the private sector (personal comm., July 16, 2012).

But he *really* wants homeless individuals there. In theorizing homelessness by drawing on and appropriating wider cultural mythologies, Maryland ascribed both social and individual failures as complimentary causes. While Maryland saw a role for the

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<sup>18</sup> For discussion of the transformation of "citizens" to "clients," see, for instance, Keil, 2002.

social in constructing poverty, the structural was largely absent, save for the productive supports of the state. For instance, he charged that "as a society, we don't challenge people to go out and work" (personal comm., July 16, 2012). Although charged with carrying out the programmatic acts of a shelter, Maryland claimed that there are "so many services" that it "enables" poverty; "you have to work so hard to be rich and it's easy to be poor" (personal comm., July 16, 2012). This was a rather surprising conceptualization of the shelter by one of its administrators. Here, the disciplinary programs of the shelter don't necessarily remake homeless bodies and lifeways, but rather provide a comfort for them that serves to make the maintenance of homeless poverty "easy." This frustrated sense of the biopolitical failure-to-improve is also shared by some of the local officials I talked to (which I will discuss below).

Of course, there are many homeless individuals at the shelter who do take advantage of the channels of "legal" earning, as Bruce spelled out in his describing of his shelter's "spot jobs" program. But even here, the pall of irresponsibility and idleness are etched into the bodies of the homeless. In describing the temporal fluctuations of the shelter's work program, Maryland states that even though the shelter makes job training a principal initiative, those in such programs present a challenge: "their mentality is to work awhile and *take a vacation*" (emphasis original, personal comm., July 16, 2012). In other words, the irresponsibility of the homeless in job training is to act like any middle class employee – to work a while and then take a vacation. Similarly, the tying in of panhandling to irresponsibility was unsurprisingly articulated as "[w]hen the public gives money to panhandlers, the money can be spent on things they shouldn't have" (personal comm., July 16, 2012), such as junk food or intoxicants. This is a vision that demands

"the" homeless *earn* their moments of pleasure and escape through the difficulties, exertions and sacrifices of wage labor.

As Katz (1989) posits, such constructions of the poor serve to “redefine issues of power and redistribution” that lie at the heart of poverty and reframe the debate in terms of family, race, and culture; all things that are apparently deficient or lacking for the poor and homeless (p8). And as Piven and Cloward (1993) note, historically most writers who comment on poor relief programs and welfare policy (authors who are “usually enmeshed in the relief system, either as its ideologues or administrators”) see poverty, the poor, and interventions toward such as a moralist undertaking (p xviii). These moral prescriptions for poverty have been deployed to shape the processes and aims of intervention so as to divide poor populations into two camps: those able to work and those *dis*-abled and thus allowed public charity. In this vein, Jencks (1992) helpfully instructs that there are “at least four socially acceptable reasons for being poor:” being too old for productive work, having a *physical* disability, being in school, and having a low income (“so long as you work steadily”) (p149). The poor who do not fall into any of these categories are deemed to be “undeserving” of public assistance.

In his creation of the deserving poor, Jencks does not mention *mental* “disabilities” or “illnesses.” However, the service providers I spoke to are increasingly understanding homeless individuals through the medical terminologies of pathology and dependency. Through the increasing medicalization of poverty, intervention strategies change; the poor (at least those on welfare or other forms of public support) are reframed and constructed as a population of dependent persons. Or, as Peck (2001) shows, the shift in policy has been to reform welfare and social supports, not to end poverty as an effect



of economic distribution. As such, interventions are crafted to target the so-called culprits of welfare dependency; a permissive society and equally undisciplined homeless subjects (Piven and Cloward, 1993; Schram, 2000; Applebaum, 2001; Peck, 2001; Bonds, 2009).

What interests me more about the officials and administrators I talked to are not so much their conceptualizations of the poor and homeless as lazy, dependent and undisciplined. Instead, the officials I talked to were clearly frustrated by - and confused on how to address - the ways in which some homeless individuals performed "service resistance" to escape the forced hierarchy of biopolitical relations. In as rich a definition as any, Oakey, the Director of a municipal office that oversees homelessness issues explained how his agency sets out to "educate" local decision-makers on the service resistant "facet" of homelessness in Las Vegas:

And I think we've made progress. I mean, it's not fixed, But it's getting done. The other one is I think we're really focusing on this year, is, um, making it understandable. You know, to the people who know of homelessness, there's a lot of assumptions associated with homeless [sic]. If you mention about a homeless person, I'm gonna tell you, my councilmen [sic] right now, first and foremost thinks of the man or the woman pushing a shopping cart full of bags that hasn't bathed in three months.

When we did our last presentation, which I guess we could give you a copy of, that we did for our Council, it's also educating: don't just think it's just this. There's a *whoooooole* [pauses] there's a lot of different types – categories – like, you've got the ones who don't want it – they're service resistant. And that's, hence, the mental institutions and certain kinds of facilities. They don't have those kind of resources.

You've got the legal issues – that, that, you can't make them. Even though they don't even know [laughs] what they're turning down. But you can't make them. It's teaching, it's educating everybody about all these facets. Because so many people think it's just a matter of getting people off the streets. It's *way* more than that. (personal comm., July 19, 2012, emphases original)

Oakey is explaining two important ways that the local government conceptualizes and deploys discourses of "the service resistant." First, their resistance is simply implicated *as* mental illness. Second, Oakey contends that to deal with individuals engaged in service resistance, the intent is to do "way more" than to simply "get them off the streets." As I argue throughout, this last cryptic statement – that "something more" than attending to the basic need for shelter is the work of governance – points to a deeper struggle with homelessness. It's not just an issue of renegotiating the political economies of shelter and food distribution, but rather a struggle over sovereignty and agency and the degree to which intransigent subjects (and their food-bearing allies) can assemble (in) space so that they might hope to forge their own relevant lifeways.

I will now map out these territories of frustration, as the participants in this study described them. Incidentally, there is a rather surprising backdrop to these officials' frustrations. Although local officials conceive of service resistance and mental illness as tightly imbricated, even these same officials concede that something else (such as desires for safety) might explain refusals to engage with the city's shelters. In responding to a question about what this official's "wish list" would be for homeless services in his municipality, Oakey expressed some reservations about the current shelter model:

I've said to [my staff members], shit, if I became homeless, I don't know if I'd go to the shelter first! I've heard stories. I've heard them. I think I'd try to live in my car first! It's just a true – a sad fact. Because I wouldn't go there. (personal comm., July 19, 2012)

This is striking: it is when this official "becomes" homeless that *he also imagines becoming service resistant*. And while "service resistant" was consistently and constantly

equated with and conceptualized as mental illness, Oakey presents resistance as a coping and survival mechanism. Further, he implicitly sees the need for types of care that privilege the needs of these intransigent bodies – precisely the types of care that FNBLV and Project Aqua engage in, much to the professional chagrin of this official and his colleagues.

As I will argue in the next chapter, it is precisely one's capacity to enact solidarity from a sense of shared vulnerability that allows for a transcendence of biopolitical logics. For instance, as I'll show in the case of two ad hoc food sharing activists, the little social (and nearly biological) deaths of depression and illness were not "power's limit," but rather their catalyst. Here too, in the case of Oakey, the pretended homelessness that he imagines also opens up possibilities for re-drawing and re-imagining the contours of the "service resistant" and the range of policy aims and interventions that the local government might want to pursue.

Interestingly, Oakey seems to imply that there is a certain "cruel optimism" inherent to the shelterplex; that is, the pursuit of something needed or wanted – in this case, shelter - "is actually an obstacle to [one's] flourishing" (Berlant, 2011a, p1). In this supposition, Oakey imagines the shelter as a place of danger, or a place otherwise unfit for living in<sup>19</sup>. This contrasts to Bruce's formulation of the choices between living on the street or in the shelter: in trumpeting the regional shelters' use of a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database, one of the outcomes of calculation is that it "proves" intransigence on the part of the service resistant. As Bruce analyzed the

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<sup>19</sup> Incidentally, this will come up again in (Chapter 4). Oakey intimates an exchange with "Joe," a homeless individual, that serves to confirm the shelter as a place of danger. But yet shelter-supremacist policy remains the default option.

intersections of need and service, he claimed that "[p]eople say there's no place for them [the homeless] to go but the street. That's not true." In other words, the statistical fact of empty shelter beds and bodies in the street illustrates only a dogged unwillingness to submit to "responsible" ways of living that the shelter offers.

Oakey's comment, though, suggests a more complicated arithmetic on the part of homeless individuals. As one FNBLV activist joked: "if people are sleeping outside in 100 degree heat instead of in the shelter, maybe your shelter sucks!"(personal comm., July 26, 2012). In the moment of imagining homelessness, Oakey sees the shelter as its own *opposite*: not a place of safety and refuge, but a threatening place and a particular cruelty holding that the shelter-seeking should be shunted into institutions that likely result in the theft of homeless individuals' property or assaults upon their bodies.

It also begs the question of why government bureaucracy continues to insist that all homeless persons engage with a system that *they themselves wouldn't turn to in a moment of need*.

#### *Faith-ful feeding: Containment and coercion*

Given the perception held by local government officials of laws that seek to defend homeless people's rights to self-determination – such as the laws that rein in forced institutionalization – new techniques of coercion must be exploited to bring homeless bodies into the biopolitical institutions waiting to manage them. However, to the degree that government is prevented from blithely, forcefully institutionalizing homeless individuals, it can create the *conditions* by which the homeless are compelled to

seek help only through the traditional shelter system. Or, to paraphrase Margaret Thatcher, government policy should create "no alternative" to the shelter system.

Additionally, where the law outright defends the right for individuals to "feed" or otherwise share food with the homeless in Las Vegas (under certain conditions and to certain extents), other methods of control must be pursued to stop these activities. One such strategy takes the form of portraying "street feedings" or food sharing as bad actions that mean well, but ultimately only serve to harm the homeless, either through the threat of contaminated food, or more generally by "feeding" being done in lieu of a program of wraparound services. Through this sort of state sorcery, giving food to homeless individuals becomes dangerous and the material culture of food preparation and sharing becomes a potential vector to plague the homeless community. The solution is, of course, to collaborate with the local government (and its attendant nonprofits) to provide services in ways these institutions approve of. Disruptions to homeless people's geographies of survival in Las Vegas are keenly focused on ad hoc food provision.

Revisiting an earlier quote from a shelterplex administrator, giving money to homeless individuals is conceived of as a disservice, because "the" homeless may use the money for "Things they shouldn't have," like booze or junk food. On this point, Berlant (2011) points out that food often transcends the merely bio-pragmatic; it is one of the "few spaces of reliable, controllable pleasure that people have" (p115) and is a major activity in maintaining the "ordinary life" that is lived outside the temporal and affective structures of biopoliticized lifeways. After all, the logic that underpins the operation of sovereignty through biopower is that decision points are made to determine how lives are to proceed and how they will be administered and to what ends. For instance, the

biopolitical logics of shelter administrators assert that panhandling is bad because it allows "the" homeless freedom to escape the regimentation of their reproduction. That is, they may hit up the bodega for a candy bar, not the shelterplex for an apparently balanced meal. What the shelterplex is seeking to prevent is the exercise of pleasure and idleness.

Berlant (2011) argues that alternate conceptions of what it means to be "sovereign" or "active" can be teased out from those idle moments of pleasure, unconcerned with "decision" or "self-assertion" and that food and eating is one such source of stray moments (p98)<sup>20</sup>. Berlant elaborates further, articulating such forms of pleasure-seeking as "dropping out" from regimes of "improvement:"

In this scene, activity toward reproducing life is neither identical to making it or oneself *better*, nor a mimetic response to the structural conditions of a collective failure to thrive, not just a mini-vacation from being responsible – such activity is also directed toward making a less bad experience. It's a relief, a reprieve, not a repair.

While these acts are not all unconscious – eating involves many kinds of self-understanding, especially in a culture of shaming and self-consciousness around the moral mirror choosing pleasures so often provides – they are often consciously and unconsciously not toward imagining the long haul, for example (p 117, emphasis original).

What Berlant is saying is that some forms of attention to the self – pleasure – are ways of escaping the regimentation of reproducing the body and the subject in the service of an imposed future. That is, the shelterplex seeks to hurtle homeless subjects (and their bodies) through a future that projects them as good, servile employees. For the shelters, and the political logics that animate them, it is precisely the spaces of idle pleasure that are read as intransigence to these futures, and constitute an expression of agency which must be guarded against. This remains a political priority even in this city of "sin" and

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<sup>20</sup> I will offer some speculations and pose questions as to how FNBLV might answer Berlant's invitation to conjuring "better ways to talk about activity oriented toward the reproduction of ordinary life" and Foucault's posing of what could constitute "antidisciplinary" power later.

skin and sensation. And, as I trace in Chapter 3, this is precisely what some FNBLV activists made of their involvement in food sharing picnics – that the space of the picnic was not just about the actual, material, life-furthering food, but also about the creation of a safe, non-demanding respite in which homeless individuals can "chill out" in a mutually-supportive environment. It's, as Berlant says, a relief from the speed of capitalist life that demands them to keep moving, both spatially and figuratively, through an economic milieu which provides decreasing promise of "the good life" of "getting ahead" in capitalist life.

As I argue in the following chapter, FNBLV's weekly picnics constitute an assemblage in (and of) space that functions to reject and forge alternatives to the cruel optimism of capitalism's empty promises of "the good life." Responding to the disciplinary futurities demanded by the shelterplex, FNBLV instead aims to enact community and respite from the spaces of the shelter and the street. They also hold that it is inherently good and legitimate for caring individuals to share meals with the hungry. In response, the key strategy local government uses to foster collaboration is to use "street feeders" sense of responsibility and care as a weapon by insinuating that ad hoc "feeding" activities are inherently *harmful* to the homeless. This sentiment was broadly echoed in conversations with local government officials and nonprofit administrators alike. As one local official, Bracken, opined:

I mean, when and if you do that [give food to the homeless], there's other things you have to look at. You have to look at potential health issues, because if food isn't cooked properly or prepared properly, you can have a health epidemic on your hands. And hence, what does that do? That drives more people to our hospitals, and on top of that, do those people have insurance? No. And so who does, where does that create a strain? It creates more of a strain on the finances for the jurisdictions. And especially most importantly, University Medical Center, which is the County hospital (personal comm., July 2, 2012).

Apparently, it is those who nourish the bodies of the homeless with prepared food that are potentially responsible for ill health. This was a sentiment that was repeatedly voiced by government and shelter administrators: absent a government-licensed kitchen for food preparation, *of course* ad hoc individuals were risking the health of the people they wish to serve. McWilliams, an administrator at a nonprofit homeless service agency conceived of ad hoc feedings as both risky to the homeless, as targeting a certain stratum of the homeless and enabling them:

Well, we have – and this is verifiable – we have very fine feeding places for people who can't get food. At [three different large shelters]. The [first shelter] put in a brand new kitchen and dining room. [The second shelter], I've worked with them a lot, I've been in their dining room, they have great food. Some can be purchased on the EBT card, some of the meals are free. Same with [the third shelter].

So within a few miles of here, there are three great places where people can access food. Daily, hot, nutritious and at no risk to them. However, the homeless population is dispersed across this entire county, and it's very large. And then within that population, there are always going to be people that are not going to go to an agency, for different reasons. They may be service resistant. They may be severely mentally ill or still involved in some criminal or chemical dependence, which makes them more – well, less likely to go to an agency. They wanna stay on the fringe.

And then, you have the questions of food security. Are we feeding people on the street with food, possibly, that might be contaminated, and also, then, what happens if it's a sack lunch, to the refuse when they're done? Does it just end up on the street? I understand these questions from the neighbors' perspective. (personal comm., July 17, 2012).

First, note the implicit association between service resistance and mental illness. Second, there is a clear association of ad hoc care and risk. Third, there is a broader concern with "waste" and "concerns" that "neighbors" might have. Litter and the discarding of used items is transformed from the assumed and accepted ambient materiality of cities to a threat to the public realm. Similarly, Bruce recounted a time period in which ad hoc



"feeders" routinely "flocked" to Skid Row, bringing sandwiches and home-cooked meals and clothes to "the" homeless. Bruce's contention was that these activities created a mess and a health hazard for the neighborhood. He also claimed that ad hoc feedings cost "the" homeless people services at the shelterplex: "we put trash barrels out, spending \$900 a week on private trash removal. So, do we want to spend \$900 a week on trash or on food?"

As an alternative, Bruce offers that street feeders can "bring a palette of food to [the shelter], make it here, serve it here. They can do it here – the right way." Continuing, the supposition of the shelterplex as "proper" care is born out in two ways. First, Bruce claims that "people have gotten sick" from food handed out on the street. To emphasize his point, he asked if I'm familiar with "the burrito lady." Apparently, once, a number of homeless individuals became ill with food poisoning after eating burritos handed out by a regular Skid Row "feeder." Thus, the example of a burrito-wielding street feeder used by this regional government official served as an example of why ad hoc acts of care and kindness can go horribly wrong.

In other words, government officials' and shelterplex administrators' oft-repeated conceptualization of ad hoc food provision as dangerous and contaminated and thus likely harmful to homeless individuals served two conjoined purposes. First, the equation of ad hoc food provision and illness attempts to make such meals more dangerous by insinuating that homeless individuals are more likely to meet harm as a result of eating such meals. Second, it creates an "inside" to food provision in homeless communities; meals prepared and served at the shelters are safe, because the meals outside the shelter are potentially toxic.

While the specter of dangerous food practices and the resulting illness and increased mortality lurks within every unregulated kitchen, my 5 month experience with FNBLV and Project Aqua was remarkably free of ill health. As the FNBLV model is premised around the picnic – as opposed to a hierarchal soup line – *everyone* eats at Baker; those of us that bring and share food also eat and share the food everyone else has brought. As a practical matter, Saturday nights spent in my small kitchen weren't as much about making food for others as it was making food for *myself and* others. I put a great deal of care and cleanliness into the various dishes I had prepared. In analyzing where the Burrito Lady went wrong, Bruce instructed that "dairy is a problem" in that it has the propensity to "go bad" in the heat of the desert (personal comm., July 6, 2012). FNBLV, as a matter of practicality and food safety, as well as a politics of non-violence prepares only vegan<sup>21</sup> food, thus eliminating the dangers associated with spoilage. The shelters, incidentally, make frequent use of meat and dairy products donated by local supermarkets and food wholesalers.

There's another side to the conceptualization of the "right" way to help "the" homeless. Bruce also explains that the proliferation of ad hoc street feeders operating outside the purview of the shelterplex as "that's shame on us;" because such feeders aren't "educated" about the range of homeless services that the shelter offers, such as job programs, financial literacy classes, sobriety programs, and so forth (personal comm.,

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<sup>21</sup> During a conversation with an FNBLV activist at a Baker Park picnic, one homeless attendee remarked that dehydration while in the elements is a constant battle, and can cause significant injury. After elaborating on the various strategies to stay hydrated, this individual then concluded "the best way's fruits and vegetables." Indeed, as the Environmental Protection Agency's (2006) *Excessive Heat Events Guidebook* instruct in their list of "dos" and "don'ts" of staying hydrated and healthy during Emergency Heat Events, individuals should "eat light, cool, easy-to-digest foods such as fruits or salads" (p51). By contrast, one listed "don't" was to eat "heavy, hot, or hard-to-digest foods" such as, ostensibly, well-cooked meat (p51)

July 6, 2012). Returning to my conversation with Bracken, this official later indicated what it would take to minimize the risk to homeless individuals' exposure to bad food and non-expert help – a “faith forum” hosted by the Las Vegas Mayor's office where "key groups can be in a contained area" and provide food and "counseling, spiritual healing, whatever they want to do" in a city-sanctioned, contained area (personal comm., July 2, 2012).

Here, Bracken clearly draws distinctions between methods of care and differing conceptions of homeless populations. Just as Bruce supposes that his shelter's spending on trash removal to clean up after ad hoc feeders steals from what are termed legitimate shelter services, so too does Bracken claim that ad hoc feeding takes from the so-called deserving homeless. That is, the "feeding all the time energy" detracts from energies devoted to helping homeless veterans, something this official deems as a more "deserving" population (personal comm., July 2, 2012).

To manage the problem of ad hoc food sharing, a clear spatial fix is proposed by local officials. The vision of the Mayor's office is to not just fix or improve "the" homeless of the city by way of their enclosure into the shelterplex, but now to organize and contain scattered ad hoc *volunteers* into a central place where “feedings” can occur along with services. Bruce, a shelter administrator, also described the nascent Faith Forum to me as a way to coerce the behavior of the service resistant, but again with a twist: he explained that his shelter is trying to get so-called feeders to give their food to the shelter so that feedings can be done in their facility. However, for those resisting that tactic, the Faith Forum is conceived as a managed place where street feeders can operate. This way, faith groups can continue to express their religiosity, but the local state can

spatially reassemble the networks of feeders and shelters in ways that they hope facilitate responses to homelessness through the logics of biopolitical programming.

It is also apparent that the another aim of this proposal is to create a hierarchy of feeding groups that serve to make the control of time and space in the contained feeding area the purview of local state-selected groups. While Bracken wouldn't share who the "key groups" were, his description of the Faith Forum made it clear that there are particular – and non-threatening – groups that the Mayor's office had selected to fulfill the duties of leadership. During his description of the Faith Forum, he traced a disciplining mechanism that could be afforded by the city's selection of certain groups as "key" groups:

[O]nce our group can get the key people who are doing it [“feeding”] on a regular basis, once we get them on board, then when these smaller groups start popping up here and there, they're going to start enforcing it, saying “No! *You can't be out there* on Tuesdays! You need to coordinate with whatever-whatever, so you can get in on a day” (personal comm., July 2, 2012, emphasis original).

What Bracken is envisioning is an encampment where "key" feeding groups are allowed to administer the space of the feeding zone and prescribe myriad scheduling regimes on client feeding groups. The ordering of ad hoc groups into a power relation of "key groups" and groups whose time and manner of care are prescribed by the key groups is clearly called for by way of the Faith Forum and constitutes an effective way by which the local government can exert control over the "feeders." This is further evidenced by Bracken's supposition that the Faith Forum will allow for local officials to "hopefully redirect some of that feeding-all-the-time energy, so to speak, into other things" (personal comm., July 2, 2012).

## Conclusion

At its simplest, this project traces out why *particular* forms of food sharing are under attack, and what can be learned about the particular flavors of neoliberalism and affective governance at work in Las Vegas from those particularities. In the Las Vegas case, two distinct types of ad hoc food sharing groups have emerged. First, faith-based groups operating in the context of local churches operate throughout the city, providing food as a means to engage in religious proselytization. Other groups conceive of food sharing as a political act tied to a broader set of active commitments. Namely, activist food sharing groups such as Food Not Bombs Las Vegas and Project Aqua share food to make both homelessness *and* the social relations formed through solidarity and mutual aid visible<sup>22</sup>.

Monitoring both the local state's response to food sharing activities occurring in public space and the ways they talk about it to an interested investigator sheds light on how government officials and nonprofit sector administrators in Las Vegas conceptualize their (and each other's) role in maintaining order. It also provides the backdrop for why – and how – the local state delineates instructive “do's and don'ts” for those wanting to share food. I argue that conceptions of so-called correct forms of care are shaped through a territory of frustration delineated by the Las Vegas shelterplex. This frustrated spatiality is mapped by local officials who view the shelters as potentially unsafe and dangerous – or at least more dangerous than living in a car and attempting to navigate homeless life outside of the shelter. On the other hand, the role of the shelter was described by one shelterplex administrator as enabling homelessness by way of shelter services making life easier. In the context of this frustration, local officials and shelterplex administrators then

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<sup>22</sup> While this chapter makes a distinction between these two types of ad hoc feeding groups, in the following chapter, I will focus on FNBLV And PA and provide an ethnography of their work.

describe the practices of ad hoc aid as being *more* dangerous than those of the shelter. For instance, officials and administrators are quite clear that the presence of ad hoc food provision near the shelters puts the responsibility for waste management on the shoulders of the shelter, thus endangering shelter programming by way of having to pay for trash removal. Other discourses contend that ad hoc food preparation is unclean and unsanitary and presents a danger to the health of those living on the streets.

This project addresses an additional puzzle. This is a moment in which urban governance has naturalized notions, discourses and practices of neoliberal entrepreneurialism and privatization. Yet, local government and the shelterplex in Las Vegas targets those voluntary, private, individual non-state actors that would take up the slack in providing homeless services. There is a clash between taken-for-granted neoliberal desires to devolve social service provision to increasingly small non-state scales and actually allowing those devolved practices to occur in wholesale. Drawing from these tensions, I argue that neoliberalism in Las Vegas is less a technical, rational mode of governance than it is a set of moral imperatives enforced by particular disciplinary regimes.

That is, while there is a seeming contradiction between neoliberalism's doctrines of devolution and the practice of stopping seemingly entrepreneurial, ad hoc food sharing, the city's actions to prevent such aid to “the<sup>23</sup>” homeless is premised more along

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<sup>23</sup> Throughout many of my interviews (particularly among shelterplex and government officials), the category of homeless was preceded by the definite article “the.” I place it in quotes here to draw attention to this oversimplified, singularized conceptualization of homelessness. There are many reasons an individual may be homeless (Dear and Wolch, 1987; Wolch and Dear, 1993; Takahashi, 1996; Klodawski, Aubry, Farrell, 2006; Mitchell 2010) and there are increasingly diverse members of the homeless community; The formerly dominant conceptualization of “the” homeless as a single male hobo (Mitchell, 2011) is now joined on the streets by runaway LGBT youth, heterosexual couples (some with children), the elderly, women, the deinstitutionalized mentally ill, free-spirited anarcho-

lines of moral superiority than devolutionary, libertarian proclivity. Local government and the shelterplex deploys this in two ways. First, a sort of technico-moralism holds rogue, ad hoc acts of care as shoddy and dangerous to the homeless. These machinations are then, in turn, embedded in regulations used to discourage so-called feeders from giving food to homeless individuals. Secondly, bare-fisted and emotional appeals to the "common sense" prescription of what the homeless *really* need were routinely voiced by local officials and shelterplex administrators: submission to various social hierarchies and a temporally-structured life.

Incidentally, the processes by which the local state forecloses upon food sharing and makes it dangerous foreground a more specific analysis of the politics of food sharing that I will launch in Chapter 4. In that chapter I argue that ultimately, assaults on food sharing move beyond the regimes of biopower, and constitute a nascent urban necropolitics.

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punks, the foreclosed-upon middle class and undocumented individuals.

### CHAPTER 3

#### **“I JUST DON'T KNOW WHY THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT WE'RE ALIVE!” FOOD SHARING AND THE ASSEMBLING OF SPACE IN LAS VEGAS**

*I mean, people care [about the homeless]. But there is a sense of wanting that sanctuary – it's the American Dream, sanctuary. Enclosure. It's the fortress mentality we really have to break down. So people care, but they – it's like, breaking down that emotional barrier, creating that empathy and that resonance on a very visceral level: the level of touch [is what we want to do].*

- “Lewis,” Las Vegas food-sharing activist (personal comm., July 7, 2012)

How does Food Not Bombs Las Vegas (FNBLV) use space? How do their practices of care rework notions of "claiming" space as a key social movement strategy? Building from the analysis in the previous chapter, I turn here to explicitly address one of the dissertation's three main research questions:

*Through their food-based activism, what precisely is Food Not Bombs Las Vegas (FNBLV) trying to say about urban food politics – and space – in Las Vegas?*

In this chapter, I trace FNBLV's competing narrative of how to practice<sup>24</sup> care for the hungry through the framework of solidarity. Indeed, one of Food Not Bombs' earliest and pithiest slogans is “Solidarity Not Charity!” This expression is meant to erase the biopolitical distinctions between “insiders” and “outsiders” or “feeders” and “homeless.”

In other words, the politics of solidarity as practiced by FNBLV in visible spaces aims to

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<sup>24</sup> Previous drafts of this chapter read "...how to best practice care..." Anarchism is very uncomfortable with the implication of the adjective "best." On one hand, "best" can be relatively innocent: the best way to prepare dried beans is to add some kombu. That is, do what you will, but experience shared through advice shows there are ways of getting something done that are more efficient or enjoyable than others. On the other hand, "best" can introduce all sorts of authoritarianisms: the best way to care for the homeless is to teach them how to be responsible. That is, I compel you to bend to my way of relating to the world. Finally, I settled on "practice care," because it's work that is done often, with some mistakes, help from others, and ultimately, gets figured out.



connect groups and people across their multiple identities in ways that challenge forced, normative orderings of individuals. This is partially spelled out in a sort of “how-to” flyer FNB produced for the benefit of those wishing to start their own FNB chapter:

The purpose of Food Not Bombs is to communicate in the most effective way possible with as many people as we can while providing free healthy vegan food to anyone without restriction [...] at the most visible location possible provides a safe place for everyone to enjoy a tasty meal without the stigma of needing to eat at a charity (Food Not Bombs, n.d.).

Indeed, activists with FNBLV use space in a public park and set up a food *sharing*<sup>25</sup> spaces for *anyone who showed up*. While it is often the case that the majority of those who do show up to eat are indeed homeless, FNBLV does not often articulate what they do as expressly “feeding” *the homeless*. Instead of notions of “feeding,” with the paternalistic implications carried by that term, Food Not Bombs refers to the activity of the picnic as food *sharing*. This is also marked by activists' eating *with* the homeless, something that I did not observe “charitable” or church-based organizations engaged in ad hoc food provision doing. As I will discuss later, I argue these are expressions of a larger project that works to erase the boundaries set by biopolitical notions of *population* – in this case, that of “citizen” and “homeless.”

This chapter also situates FNBLV according to their spatial practice. The geographic literature routinely conceptualizes the spatial practices that groups such as FNBLV engage in as “claiming” space. Mitchell (1995) chronicles spatial claims in Berkeley's People's Park, adding that the “claiming space in public” (p115) is what allows social groups *entrée into* “the public.” That is, deigning to administer and stake

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<sup>25</sup> The local officials and shadow-state administrators I talked to routinely referred to ad hoc food provision as “feeding.”

(temporary) ownership of a given space is how a group of individuals can also claim a belonging to a universal public and assert their rights to the city (Lefebvre, 1967; Harvey, 2003; Marcuse 2009; Purcell, 2013). Similarly, Miller and Nicholls (2013) contend that "claiming – occupying - [urban] spaces makes it possible for activists to challenge the dominant symbolic order" while producing their own power and action in the creation of alternative socialities (2013, p453). Conversely, the connections between claiming and belonging play out in processes of gentrification and economic development where local elites further marginalize precarious populations by *limiting* their ability to make claims on spaces in the city (Fraser, 2004).

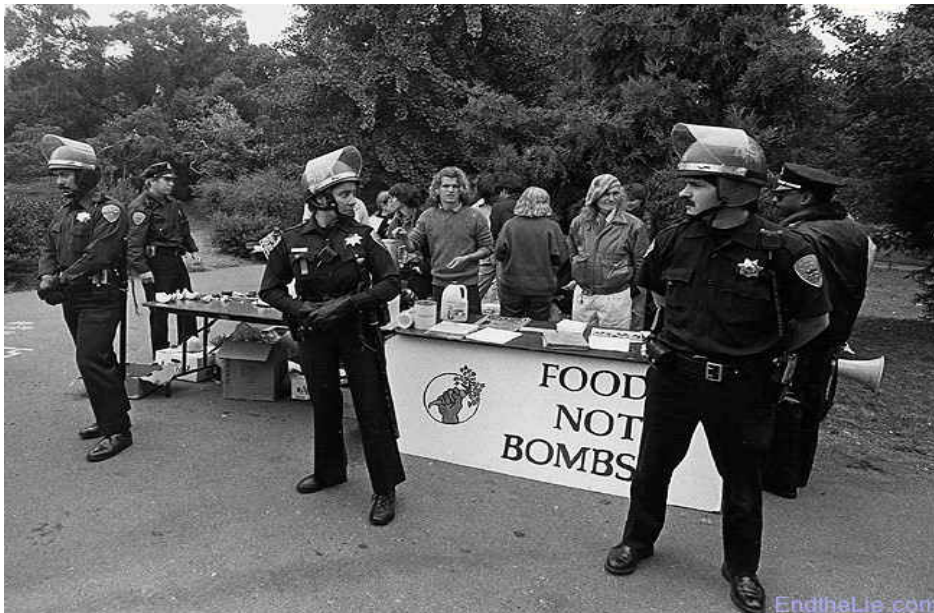


Fig 3.1: Who claims? Food Not Bombs and the police in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. Photo by Greg Gaar (in Butler and McHenry, 1992).

In this chapter, I argue – in contrast to conceptions about claiming space in urban scholarship – that the specific kinds of politics and spatial practices that FNBLV enacts

require a different spatial articulation than that of claiming. The ad hoc food sharing activists I talked to describe their work as including the purpose of "claiming" space, but ultimately, in ways that move beyond taking space. For instance, a few key FNBLV activists were involved with the Las Vegas iteration of the Occupy movement from its inception, as well as regularly participating in local protests of nuclear testing, the War in Iraq, and local police brutality. This illustrates a commitment to space claiming in the service of antagonistic politics that assert a commitment to taking public space and using it in ways that assert particular demands to be satisfied. Such tactics assert a right to the city, emboldening a "cry and a demand" (Lefebvre, 1996, p158). Similarly, as Byron and Nicholls distill the role of claiming space in the city: "claiming – occupying – its spaces makes it possible for activists to challenge the dominant symbolic order, mobilize and concentrate their own symbolic, social and material power and make the case for alternative possible worlds" (p453). That is, instead of or in addition to the ballot box, these individuals use the public square in order to enfranchise themselves into the broader public and to advocate through being public that some authority act on behalf of the marginalized.

On the other hand, my reading of FNBLV and PA's practices of food sharing propose a departure from a reading that these organizations are primarily premised on the claiming of space. Instead, in this chapter, I argue that the spatial deployment of the picnic is more concerned with making care visible to foster the building of community and a broader culture of being active, present and responsible in one's own community. This is the communitarian, mutually-aiding "politics at the level of touch" that Lewis was advocating in this chapter's opening quote. FNBLV and PA picnics and food sharing

events are the spatial practices of these politics and provide a foil to an antagonistic politics of demanding government action on behalf of homeless individuals. In this chapter, I argue that the practice of the picnic as a social, convivial and safe space for activists and homeless individuals alike serves as an antidisiplinary method of care; care premised on creativity and solidarity, and care that confronts the biopolitical logics of the shelterplex and the power relations of the category of the service resistant.

In other words, what I argue in this chapter is that the spatial practices of FNBLV and PA are not carried out to claim space in order to carve out a space in the broader public for homeless individuals. Instead, I argue that these ad hoc food sharing groups are committed to a politicized spatial practice of making homelessness visible in ways that serve to show that homeless individuals exist in our midst, aren't dangerous, can enter into social relations with others and that caring individuals can contribute to the survival of homeless individuals in myriad ways.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

As I argue later, this emerges from a broader critique that "the public" is set apart from "the homeless," and is thus a flawed concept. The public, after all, is highly mediated; an antagonistic politics regarding hunger, for instance, might take the shape of occupying strategic public space(s) and demanding an increase in the level of food supports or food stamps. Food stamps, however, are beset by multiple politics, and the policies administering them are up for constant renegotiation, crosscut by power relations emerging from questions of "race," gender, personal responsibility, bodily girth,

perceived fecundity, matters of taste in food, and nutritional considerations. As such, FNBLV doesn't so much want to join the public, or otherwise demand the hungry be more readily immersed into the contingent, mediated policies of food provision.

Rather, I argue through an anarchist framework that the spatial strategy of the picnic is primarily to reconceptualize the public as an informed, caring humanity doing the constant work of erasing processes and structures of hierarchy and domination. This framework informs a strategy that uses public space to visibly practice agonistic politics that seek to explode biopolitical notions and categorizations of "homeless" or "citizen" or "volunteer" by openly forging sociable, friendly, nonhierarchal networks of care - the safe spaces of the weekly picnic - that elicit a different kind of manifesto not instigated by antagonistic struggles. Such a manifesto might read: "we assert the right to - ourselves - act and intervene for and with those left on the biopolitical wayside."

It is through this framework that anarchist, agonistically-centered activist groups such as FNBLV work. It is a frame of political reference that seeks to reinscribe power relations toward a decidedly more non-hierarchal model. Instead, the political force of FNBLV promotes values of mutual aid, solidarity, and voluntary social relations (Call, 2002, p14). This tradition differs from others on the politically antagonistic left (such as Marxism) or right (such as fascism), in that it does not seek to gain control of the instruments of social power, be they a state, a class of people or the economic means of production. Instead, the anarchist tradition seeks to negate and abolish all forms of coercion and control as the organizing principle of politics and society (May, 1994).

As this chapter traces out, FNBLV and PA operate from multiple conceptions of spatiality. While they are informed by the politics of solidarity and visibility that FNBLV and PA espouse, the "claiming" of space is not the most compelling reading of their activism. The two quotes at the beginning of this chapter illustrate the underlying assumptions between both the ad hoc food sharing groups I collaborated with and the local government officials I spoke to. While Lewis<sup>26</sup> sees the problem of homelessness (purposefully plural) as a broader breakdown of affect and agonism in the face of a culture of enclosure, the local official supposes programmatic failures of biopolitical calculation are the culprit: "ninety percent" of the problems of homelessness would go away if only the homeless stopped resisting and submitted to the state, symbolized through valid IDs<sup>27</sup>.

This argument was introduced in the previous chapter, where I discuss the connections between the spatiality of the local state's interventions in certain expressions of care. More precisely, the local government's focus on frustrating the work of care givers – *and not homeless individuals themselves* – in spatially marginal areas of the city

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<sup>26</sup> All names used are pseudonyms – in this project, I use Las Vegas streets as pseudonyms. Names such as "Lewis" or "Bruce" do not infer or imply the gender of a particular research subject.

<sup>27</sup> A missed opportunity during my interview sessions was to interject a thought experiment into my conversation with Bracken. In my current life as low-level government bureaucrat by day and dissertator by night, I am aware that any actually-government-issued ID is in fact a valid ID. That is, a state ID actually made by the State of Nevada – not forged by a private citizen – describing an individual as a particular person is a valid government ID. So, to solve homelessness, why not simply print government-issued IDs for homeless persons? Ostensibly, this would facilitate the delivery of services and access to resources that homeless people need. Of course, strenuous, incredulous objections to this idea would surely arise – by these very officials themselves. What would be the likely objections to this plan, and do the objections consider homelessness? Or would they object primarily to the perceived risks to more important matters: *security and territory*? The latter, most likely. This is the basis of this chapter – the politics of homelessness espoused by FNBLV and Project Aqua come from a wholly different set of spatial assumptions than that of the liberal state and its disciplinary discourses.

point to shifting political aims. A focus on revanchist clearings of homeless individuals from the spaces of capital accumulation prefigures a broader politics of *antagonism* and space (re)claiming, where state and subject battle to lay claim to legitimacy, representation and rights through the occupation of space and the warding off of the other.

This study, however, suggests the case of frustrating ad hoc caregivers and food sharers points to conflicts over the role of the agonistic and how actors may "legitimately" - to the local state - situate themselves in relation to others and how acts of care, aid and reciprocity can play out in public. In other words, while FNBLV and PA activists tie strategies of visibility and publicity into the parts of their activism meant to raise awareness of poverty, hunger and homelessness, this is only one part of the story<sup>28</sup>. Rather, the commitment to a markedly agonistic politics that celebrates the "games of truth between governors and the governed" (Cadman, 2010, p552), and the right of asserting a voice in the practice of democracy above that of the antagonistic drive to dictate the terms by which social and political relations are premised.

It is in this context that I argue FNBLV is not primarily "claiming," but rather "assembling" public space. That is, FNBLV's particular form of activism is one that allows for intransigent homeless to eat and interact in ways that are relevant to their lives, not to the assumptions of the shelterplex. And perhaps new assemblages of space and politics are necessary. Foucault (1967) once pronounced that he "believe[d] that the anxiety of our era has fundamentally to do with space." This was, in his estimation,

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<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Marcuse's (2011) warning about the fetishization of space is apropos: "occupied space is a means to an end, and only one means among others, not the end itself" (2011, n.p.).

because "we do not live in a kind of void" where space acts as a container for people and things, but rather that individual subjects are embedded into sets of relations and obligations, and that these are in turn bound to one another through space and power. Following this, Miller and Nichols (2013) critique certain local Occupy Movements as privileging the tactics of space claiming and occupation while precisely neglecting the relevant spatialities of subaltern lives and how the everyday spatialities of these individuals can be harnessed into broader, more mobile and flexible networks of resistance.

In his analysis of nascent AIDS politics in Vancouver, Michael Brown (1997) outlines the contours of an agonistic politics of ad hoc care. To respond to the city's burgeoning AIDS crisis, a "buddying" system was put into place. "Buddies" were volunteers who performed small acts of support and care for those living with AIDS, such as changing cat litter<sup>29</sup> or spending social moments in public. Buddies, Brown argues, are a way in toward seeing "new spaces" in civil society that are somewhere between the home and the state (p152). The private relations of support and care central to buddying uncover the degree to which people with AIDS are political; after all, those that do not have the supports that buddies provided "exacerbate a person's struggle with a terminal illness, and places him/her on an unequal footing with the state and fellow members of the political community" (pp152-153). Buddying works to empower those struggling with AIDS not just inside the private spaces of the home, but also in the public sphere. It is here where "relations of privacy and intimacy" engaged in public such as sitting and conversing at a café or strolling in a park destabilize the image, discourse, and

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<sup>29</sup> Toxins or parasites in cat feces can compromise the health of those with depressed immune systems.



meaning of the person with AIDS as a human plague to be shut in and cast outside of the boundaries of “citizenship.” Brown furthers that to realize a truly radical notion of democratic citizenship, politics cannot just be antagonistic in that they pit a challenging group against an enemy, but also agonistic in that they should deploy interventions that make a positive difference in people's lives, even in seemingly small ways, like buddying (p184).

There are many parallels among the work of AIDS buddies and the tactic of Food Not Bombs's public food sharing. These small, intimate acts are done outside of appeals to the state, bring those marked with deficiencies out of institutions and into society, and in their visibility serve to challenge dominant discourses of citizenship. The relations enabled by AIDS buddies and the way buddies and those with AIDS can assemble in public serve the dual purpose of erasing the stigma of infection and also assert the viability of those living with AIDS as individuals who can simply be social and have friends.

Later in the chapter, I will elide the broader ramifications of "assembly" as it relates to space and politics and the particular activisms of FNBLV and PA. Springer (2012), however, provides a concise framework for the kinds of spatial imaginaries that give rise to enacting alternatives to the status quo. In crafting a call for human geographers to rediscover the anarchist thought that initially informed many early geographers (such as Peter Kropotkin and Elisée Reclus), Springer invites a reading of:

a manifesto for anarchist geographies, which are understood as kaleidoscopic spatialities that allow for multiple, non-hierarchical, and protean connections between autonomous entities, wherein solidarities, bonds, and affinities are voluntarily assembled in opposition to and free from the presence of sovereign

violence, predetermined norms, and assigned categories of belonging. (2012, p1607)

In carrying out Springer's invitation by way of an analysis of the work of FNBLV and PA, what Springer concisely implies here is that for anarchist (and anarchist-curious) activists, coming into contact with differently-situated actors and making – or assembling – something in society and space according to any number of mutually useful or beneficial reasons is the work of anarchy. And so, the drive of biopower, or, the disciplinary relations of "assigned categories" are among its most immediate adversaries. After all, the homeless of Las Vegas aren't removed from parks or vacant lots *only* because of trespassing laws. For instance, in the next chapter, I will trace the example of a homeless encampment on private property where the property owner *didn't* particularly care to have the camp removed. Ultimately, it wasn't the logic of property or trespass that cleared the camp, but rather the biopoliticized notions of threats to the public health that set the wheels of eviction in motion. Similarly, the local state justifies frustrating the work of food activists by deriding their work as "enabling" the homeless into becoming something much different than what the arts of official homeless care would administer.

*"Despisers of the law:" Agonism, affect, anarchy*

FNBLV and Project Aqua's food and water sharing, while done for anyone who would accept it, is also seen by activists as particularly sustaining those who do not want to use traditional shelter services. That is, these activists have also expressed fervent disagreement with the so-called common sense rhetoric issued from policymakers and shelters that homeless individuals shouldn't be in public spaces, but instead housed – and

managed – within appropriate institutions. In framing their agenda specifically through the lens of their food and water sharing as political work, nearly every activist I talked to articulated the politics of food sharing not in the language of claiming space, but of *visibility*: that precariously situated people exist in Las Vegas, that hunger is a major problem in the community and that there are simple things anyone can do to alleviate the kinds of suffering seemingly left undressed by government and the shelterplex.

While my analysis holds that FNBLV and Project Aqua do not set out to "claim" space as a *primary* concern, I do *not* mean to suggest that these groups *aren't* geographic and *don't* make spatial calculations. Rather, my argument here is premised on the assertion that the politics of solidarity are a key lens through which activists with both FNBLV and PA "see" and "read" space and action in Las Vegas. These politics of solidarity – particularly as launched by FNBLV – are prefiguratively practiced in the space of the FNBLV picnic. As FNBLV activists described it, just "hanging out" or "being in each other's scene" or otherwise creating a safe space (Schmelzkopf, 1995; Vanderbeck and Johnson, 2000; Doan, 2007; Malins, Fitzgerald, Threadgold, 2012) in which camaraderie, conversation and trust can blossom constitutes a certain emotive politics that aren't just important for their own sake, but that also serve to contrast the ways in which the local and shadow state's policies of homelessness are received and registered at the level of the body (see Routledge, 2010).

For instance, the emotional power of police removals of homeless individuals from space feels the same – as intimidation and cruelty – whether the space one is rousted from is a gentrifying neighborhood or an abandoned suburban lot or a highway overpass in an poor inner city neighborhood. Similarly, the intrusive indignities of shelter intake

procedures (Sparks, 2010) spring from emotional registers of shame and moral superiority. Through these embodied and emotional moments of clarity, different sets of questions or different analytical frameworks come to bear on the politics of homelessness and hunger in the urban spaces of Las Vegas. If the cruelty remains the same whether removing homeless bodies from the Strip or Skid Row, this calls into question the motives of rational capital accumulation and its attendant place-making as the primary motivations as the revanchist framework assumes. Instead, Carson offers an alternative analytic:

And plus, they're afraid that they know that they're one foot from homelessness, some people. Not these wealthy people or these people that are in tight [with the powerful.] I think I've come to the conclusion that the people who really, really don't care about the homeless or the oppressed or the down and out, I really believe that they're incapable of compassion. I never used to think that way, I used to get angry at them. But now I wonder if they're incapable (personal comm., June 2, 2012).

My larger conversation with Carson puts the above quote into context and provides contrasting politics between FNBLV on one hand and the local state and the shelterplex on the other. What she is proposing is that local officials and the shelterplex – regardless of the extent to which the state engages in "helping" the homeless – have lost the ability for the affective, emotional and connected politics of sociality and solidarity, exchanging them for the calculations of categorization and discipline.

There is also a real human beauty in Carson's statement that she *used* to get angry at the so-called rich. This abandonment of anger as an organizing principle expresses the broader case The Free Association (2010) makes, specifically in issuing a call for building deeper anarchist frameworks for politics and praxis. Here, The Free Association

argues that the politics of antagonism (often - but not always - fueled by anger) is problematic in that it personalizes an abstraction, a social relation: capitalism<sup>30</sup>. They argue this is problematic because it complicates the ability to resist: indeed, how does one resist a social relation?

Through incoherence, The Free Association argues. After all, in the fevered struggle of antagonistic politics, marginalized "out" groups fight the system by defining themselves as the opposite of the "in" group. Of course, this is to define oneself by the definitions of the dominant system that produced the distinctions of "in" and "out" as well as the processes that order particular groups above others. And while antagonism and anger can provide for brief moments of "gripping" (The Free Association, 2010, p1029) the world by its political problems, it also carries the danger of giving in to the seductions of contemporary neoliberal politics: piety and "microfascism (Massumi 1992, cited in the Free Association, p1028)<sup>31</sup>".

The specific politics of FNBLV begets a spatial strategy which uses public space not as much for antagonistic "claiming" or "occupying," but rather as an available, visible space to sit and share food and become, for the moments of the picnic, friends with strangers. For these moments – deeply felt on a personal level – the lines of so-called homelessness erase and dissolve, and in so doing, the moral superiority of having a home

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<sup>30</sup> In this article, they pull apart antagonistic politics against capital and "the rich," but their argument could apply to any number of artificial categorizations of people and population.

<sup>31</sup> Here, "microfascism" is an intensely personal politics where, through the pleasurable combination of hate and moral superiority, one becomes what one hates. The authors give the excellent example of a contemporary populism: "[o]ne minute we're asking the G8 to solve hunger in Africa, the next minute we're condemning young mothers who feed their children junk food" (p1028).

or a car or a job become utterly ridiculous. There are no insiders or outsiders at FNBLV picnics, no forced categorizations of population and no social hierarchies.

There is a further distinction to be made between the work of FNBLV And the ways the revanchist and legalist literatures have portrayed the promise of activism. Guattari (1996) has cautioned that social processes and the responses to them are arranged according to the language of dominant power – most often the state or capitalism. These processes create a public, and this public is highly mediated and ordered according to various – and often problematic – power relations. This insight gives power to a critique of antagonistic, space-claiming literature that contend the power of social movements is gleaned from the taking of public space and that such claiming of public space is also to claim a space in "the public." Specifically in the case of homelessness, entrée into the public is only part of what constitutes an emancipatory politics; the ability to be both visible *and* hidden are key moments in homeless people's ability to become "legitimate" actors (Sparks, 2010).

My point here is that while "the public" is highly mediated and structured upon particular power relations, and gaining entry into a public is not necessarily emancipatory. For instance, a broad critique launched by queer theorists calls into question the strategies of mainline gay rights organizations in pursuing legal challenges meant to open the institution of marriage to same-sex couples. This critique argues that "marriage" is an unrelentingly heteronormative institution and the inclusion of same sex couples into the institution of marriage will do little to call into question the broader assumptions of the deployment of marriage as an institution: to delineate and codify so-called normal behaviors that also operate as a legal mechanism of property rights and

state regulations and affirmations of correct formulations and expressions of intimacy (Brandzel, 2005).

Instead, queer theory animates actions that call into question the foundation of marriage: its imposition of norms and its place as the correct basis of forming, expressing and broadcasting intimacy. FNBLV, I argue, is a similarly queer<sup>32</sup> organization. The use of the picnic is less to claim the space of the park, and as such, to claim a stake in the broader channels of food provision and homeless politics. Instead, the picnics serve as a visible space in which to enact "sensuous solidarities" (Routledge, 2010) in convivial spaces over shared meals. In so doing, the picnics hold much the same promise that Guattari saw in Vaginal Davis' drag shows: that the moments of the picnic allow for fleeting temporalities where *mutually-assembled* bodies may create their own<sup>33</sup>, relevant socialities:

The question is to no longer know whether one will play masculine against feminine or the reverse, but to make bodies, all bodies break away from the representations and restraints of the 'social body' and from stereotyped situations, attitudes and behaviors (Guattari, 1996, p76-77).

Picnics are, in other words, to form community, not to enter the (mediated) public. FNBLV picnics are a chance, as one activist described, "to be in each other's scene" in ways that blur dominant conceptions of the categories of "homeless" and "helper" and destabilize the normative formulations of correct care.

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<sup>32</sup> Eng (1997) extends "queerness" to include any marginalized category of persons that "act against normalizing ideologies" and "resist the historical terror of social phobia and violence." (Eng, 1997, p50).

<sup>33</sup> For further discussion how subjects may (re)assemble themselves into various, multiscale networks, see also Cox, 1998; Featherstone, 2005; Ghose, 2007.

During his own collaboration with human rights organizations<sup>34</sup>, Foucault justified the work of ad hoc intervention carried out by private individuals in asking "who appointed us [to intervene], then? No one. And that is precisely what constitutes our right" (Foucault 2002, p474). Foucault's argument is buttressed by his reading of government -- they are premised upon the legitimacy that comes from acting in ways that improve the health and well-being of their citizens. When governments fail this task and suffering becomes the "silent residue of policy" (Foucault, 2002, p475), he then issues the verdict that as part of a universal, international humanity that cannot bear to tolerate the suffering of others, ad hoc groups of interested individuals have the right to organize and act in the absence of – and without the imprimatur of – governments.

Foucault's advocacy and the work of FNBLV mesh in vital ways. First, Foucault's advocacy was done visibly to publicly assert the "right to question" the governmental "regimes of truth" that seek to create, define and "improve" subjects. In the case of the boat people, as refugees, what their political suffering entailed was in not having "the right to question governments" (Cadman, 2010, p552) and, following, the "right to action" (Arendt, 2004, p296). FNBLV picnics use public, visible space to similarly assert something on behalf of urban subalterns. The primary work of the picnic is not to claim space, but to call in to question the regimes of truth that the local state and the shelterplex articulate by assembly and interaction with homeless individuals in the moments of mutual aid. It is in these moments that the assertions of government – that the lives of

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<sup>34</sup> Specifically, Foucault was quite visibly active during the early 1980s in arguing on behalf of so-called Vietnamese boat people who fled the Communist regime in the aftermath of the Vietnamese War. At the time, the refugees were marooned at sea, where they were systematically "attacked, raped, tortured and murdered by pirates in the Gulf of Thailand" (Cadman, 2010, p551). Western governments had been slow to receive or otherwise act on behalf of the defense of the refugees. Human rights groups such as *Médecins du Monde* and *Terre des Hommes* had stepped in to fill the void, with Foucault writing and speaking on their behalf.



homeless individuals are necessarily improved only by shelters and their services – are exposed along with formulations of the lifeways and methods of self- and mutual care expressed at the picnics constitute service resistance. This language of resistance, Foucault argues, traces the antagonistic bent of governance – that of domination as the project of power. It also acts as a foil to the agonistic action of FNBLV, in that it binds care and action in the service of radical democracy and mutual aid.

That is, no one – certainly not government – appointed those who share food in Baker Park or West Las Vegas, or in the shadows of Skid Row shelters to do so. And, in the ways FNBLV members articulate their anarchism, that *did* constitute their right. It was precisely empathetic action that allowed for the creation of agonistic, ad hoc geographies of food provision that didn't just feed stomachs and bodies, but nourish the tired psyches of both the hungry and lonely on the streets of Las Vegas. During these moments of empathy, the biopolitical logics of classifying "insiders/outsideers" and the pathologizing of the "service resistant" homeless melted away.

In the micro-moments and micro-spaces of the picnics, homeless individuals didn't just line up to eat as is done in the shelters or the faith-based "feedings." Instead, there was a participatory mutuality to the provision of food; they would help Carson and other members of FNBLV retrieve and move pots, kettles, boxes of food and bags of utensils from their cars to the picnic site. This was quite clearly an instance of hungry individuals taking an active role – and, indeed, responsibility – in accepting the kinds and forms of "service" *that were relevant to their lives*. Indeed, my experience of taking one handle of a large, heavy soup kettle, and the other taken by a homeless man who regularly attended the picnics, and walking stride-to-stride – together – was one of those

moments that blurred the delineation between activists and the "recipients"<sup>35</sup> of aid. In returning to the government-imposed label of service resistance, this moment is certainly resistance to biopolitical notions of care, but it is not resistance to being "served" or otherwise cared for. Instead, this moment – fleeting and ephemeral – threatens the very existence of the biopolitical state through community and solidarity: from each according to ability, to each according to need.

As geographer – and anarchist – Elisée Reclus issued, the promise of a better world comes not through anger and antagonistic struggles over the political economy of resource provision, but rather through the enacting of community and mutuality:

We, “frightful Anarchists” as we are, know only one way of establishing peace and goodwill among women and men—the suppression of privilege and the recognition of right. It pleases us not to live if the enjoyments of life are to be for us alone; we protest against our good fortune if we may not share it with others; it is sweeter for us to wander with the wretched and the outcasts than to sit, crowned with roses, at the banquets of the rich. We are weary of these inequalities which make us the enemies of each other; we would put an end to the furies which are ever bringing people into hostile collision, and all of which arise from the bondage of the weak to the strong under the form of slavery, serfage and service. After so much hatred we long to love each other, and for this reason are we enemies of private property and despisers of the law (Reclus 1884, cited in Springer, 2013, p1605).

To those of the shelterplex or the local state, who conceive of their role as constructing categorizations of "the homeless" set apart from society and citizenry and determining how to best improve their lives through regimes of biopolitical programming – that is, power premised first on domination, not distribution – what FNBLV is "cooking up" (Heynen, 2010) isn't so much nonviolent civil disobedience, but rather an existential

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<sup>35</sup> Indeed, it further blurred the terminology of *recipient* in this instance.

challenge to the affective postures of biopolitics: distrust, suspicion and the inability to empathize via the imposition of rigid categorizations of population.

### **A brief history of Food Not Bombs and Project Aqua**

#### *An abbreviated history of Food Not Bombs*



Fig 3.2: Author with FNBLV activists

The implication of picnics as food sharing spring from the broader context which gave rise to Food Not Bombs (FNB). In 1980, as part of the protest against the Seabrook nuclear power project, a coterie of Cambridge, Massachusetts-area activists took to spray-painting anti-nuclear slogans on sidewalks and other public spaces. One such oft-used slogan was “MONEY FOR FOOD NOT FOR BOMBS” (Butler and McHenry, 1992, p5, emphasis original). Eventually, this slogan was chosen by the activists as the

name for the group of activists, since they felt it best represented and articulated the politics of anti-nuclear activism (but was shortened to “Food Not Bombs”).

One of the key tenets of FNB's worldview and politics is that it holds community building and solidarity as a vital process. The way FNB approaches this as a political project is by operating against the concept of scarcity, as this threat – which lies at the heart of liberal economics – engenders competition and separation among groups of people in order to protect their resources (Butler and McHenry, 1992). More specifically, FNB was founded on the premise of political economy: that there is enough food to feed all who are hungry, but it is distributed in a way to privilege some mouths over others. FNB places this privilege as the consequence food being placed in a capitalist, not democratic system (as they offer “people would certainly elect to eat” if food were part of a democratic, cooperative economy). In FNB's analysis, when “scarcity” is the pivot from which modern states are organized, territorialistic and militaristic expressions of governance are all but assured as states compete for resources.

As a way to enact an anti-scarcity politics, FNB has historically engaged in the “recovery” of “surplus” food. As a practical expression, this includes a range of activities from dumpster diving to asking for donations of “no-longer-sellable-but-still-good” food from local retailers or farmers markets. FNB places the noncapitalist procurement of food at the center of their activism: “one of our political messages is that *there is more edible food being thrown away each day by the food industry than there are hungry people to eat it*” (Butler and McHenry, 1992, p16, emphasis original).

Urban picnics are not the only way that FNB uses food to enact its anti-capitalist politics. Another important facet of FNB's actions is that it frequently serves as the “glue” that holds broad coalitions together during times of sustained protest. For example, FNB activists from around the Midwestern United States were among the earliest occupiers of the Wisconsin State Capitol, in the aftermath of Governor Scott Walker's assault on that state's collective bargaining laws. In my own experience as a frequent Capitol protestor, it was the FNB food table and the worldwide phone orders of pizzas delivered by a local pizza shop that both sustained the bodies of protesters, and just as importantly, created bonds of community and solidarity. Incidentally, the Las Vegas area plays an important part in the history of Food Not Bombs. As “being at the center of the action [wherever a sustained direct action may take place] with our food is part of our vision,” FNB activists from across the United States play the vital role of keeping activists nourished at the annual Peace Encampments at the Nevada Nuclear Weapons Test Site (Butler and McHenry, 1992, p4).

In Las Vegas, FNBLV has been active for at least 10 years. Carson, a key figure in FNBLV, recalls that she was initially recruited to the group June 2005. At that time, FNBLV was operating out of Huntridge Circle Park, which is located just outside of the downtown area of Las Vegas. During this time, FNBLV activists were, according to Carson, mostly teenagers who would prepare and bring vegetable soup and rice and beans to Circle Park.

Although FNBLV was a rather small group of young people (plus the much older Carson), the group was able to procure large amounts of donated food, owing to a few of the young people's jobs at local supermarkets. Also, Carson was able to establish

relationships with additional food stores around Las Vegas – including a large organic grocer – eventually allowing FNBLV to come into “about a thousand pounds of food a week” (personal comm., June 2, 2012). This bounty of food transformed FNBLV picnics in Circle Park from a weekly to a daily occurrence.

During this period, daily picnics were serving about 100 people a day in the park. Although the park was already an established “hangout” for homeless people (owing partially to the availability of bathrooms), negative attention was starting to be heaped on the group and its activities. Carson recalled that an “organized group of people from the neighborhood association” were staunchly opposed to FNBLV. Beyond “bugging the City every single day,” these organized individuals “made death threats to us over the phone, because they didn't want us sharing food with the homeless at 'their' park” (personal comm., June 2, 2012).

Shortly after, there was a fatal scuffle in Circle Park involving two homeless men. As a result, the City of Las Vegas took the highly unusual step of closing the park. Ultimately, the park would remain closed for 5 years. In the meantime, Carson and FNBLV moved picnics to Frank Wright Plaza, in the heart of downtown Las Vegas. This became a highly contentious atmosphere, and eventually, the City closed this park as well (the land was sold to a private entity as part of the larger sale and redevelopment of the adjacent Las Vegas City Hall). After the closure of Frank Wright Plaza, FNBLV moved to its current location, Baker Park.

Baker Park, incidentally, underwent significant capital renovations during my fieldwork visits. The shaded picnic shelter was fenced off from the rest of the park, trees

were removed, and most of the park's open space was converted to irrigated soccer fields. Throughout the summer of 2013, FNBLV discussed a move to Jaycee Park, about 1 mile east of Baker Park, and well outside of the downtown core of Las Vegas.

*An abridged history of Project Aqua*



Fig 3.3: Author with members of Project Aqua

Another concerned collective with whom I conducted research took shape in the months leading up to my fieldwork in Las Vegas. This particular group – Project Aqua – was not affiliated with any antecedent organization prior to its formation. Instead, this was a group of friends who attended the same Buddhist temple in Las Vegas. Although the group is conceived of as leaderless, I consider Clark to be the founder of the group. Clark was, prior to what would become a full-time “job” with Project Aqua, a writer. Unfortunately, Clark suffered two relatively debilitating health episodes. The first was a

degenerative condition that caused significant vision loss, which curtailed Clark's ability to earn income as a writer.

Then, Clark contracted an intestinal disorder that required an expensive surgery. Since Clark was self-employed, he did not have access to insurance that would help with the cost of surgery. Clark's troubles were complicated due to the fact he is not “in the system” to the extent that he can secure sufficient government medical benefits. Although Clark tried to “knock on doors in the official system” all throughout the County and State bureaucracy, he found no financial help to offset his medical bills (personal comm., July 7, 2012).

It was during this period of navigating the social service system that Clark met a woman who was “cut off of food stamps – she had three kids – because she had a prescription that was not in her name in her car” (personal comm., July 7, 2012). Clark was very discouraged by this whole situation, and turned to spirituality and the solidarity offered by those at the temple to help. Clark's situation and the story of the woman kicked off of food stamps spoke to Lewis, another Project Aqua activist as the “whole idea of genocide and the killing off of classes” (personal comm., July 7, 2012).

Soon after, Lewis taught Clark how to chant, and the two would regularly meet up at the temple. Clark noted that once his health problems were resolved, that Lewis would like to “do something for people so that they wouldn't have to go through what he went through to create value in what he saw as a lack in the system” (personal comm., July 7, 2012). Because Clark's vision problems preclude him from driving, Lewis would often take him to appointments and shopping trips. Around this time, Lewis had taken to



handing out bottled water to homeless persons panhandling at stoplights. During a chanting session, Clark became very inspired by this small act of kindness and proposed to a few of his temple friends that a great way to celebrate his birthday would be to all chip in, purchase as much water as possible, and go out to Skid Row to hand out the water.

One friend, Bonneville, decided to tag along and check out the new Project Aqua. He was soon “hooked,” and soon took to spending whatever spare money he had on cases of bottled water. After a couple of months, Bonneville had the opportunity to buy a surplus Nevada Power pickup truck; this truck was pressed into vital service as the group was growing and procuring hundreds of bottles of water per week.

### **How food-sharing activists “see” space**

#### *A question of spatialities*

Lewis, from Project Aqua, described a de-emphasis on claiming space that was joined to her vision of activism as being mindful of her community and the needs within it. As Lewis' home is within two blocks of the Homeless Corridor, she would routinely give out water to people from her house and let homeless individuals drink or fill bottles from her hose (personal comm., July 7, 2012). It was through Lewis's tactic of opening herself up to existing geographies of survival that she was able to ask specific sets of questions about homelessness that arose from practical considerations of need and attention to the geographies of need in communities, not from normative formulations on what the homeless need:

We're like triage, it's like people have to survive. And it's not just about an activity, like once a week, or five times a week, or seven days a week...it's about promoting a consciousness of being aware of your environment. It's like, if we're walking or driving out of here, someone on the corner might need water – are we gonna deprive that people of water because we have to get to the official activity site? [...] It's like, where in the community and environment is there a need? And, you know, [to] be cognizant of the actual geography that we reside in. What are the demands specific to this geography? To this landscape? To this architecture? (personal comm., July 7, 2012)

Further eroding concepts of claiming, multiple FNBLV activists described their work as "not just" providing food to the hungry, but also in "building community." At the same time, food is openly shared among anyone who would show up, instead of "feeding the homeless." This is a crucial difference, as the conceptual underpinning of sharing food with all works politically to reject the logics of institutional charity; that the means of using a given place is used to serve a given population to the ends of creating particularly-lived lives. This contrasts with notions of "public" space deployed by the (local) liberal state, where loitering laws keep undesirables out of the park and the administration of park permits are specifically designed to inscribe place, time and manner restrictions on a whole host of park users' activities.

### *Spaces of solidarity*

In making hunger visible, Food Not Bombs makes it political, but in a very important way. Food Not Bombs is not asking to be granted a right from the (neo)liberal state, but is instead exerting their already-existing rights in such a way that forces a crisis of meaning with the local state. After all, it is the capacity to care for individuals that are

left unaided (whether by design or programmatic failure) by the shelterplex, government and shadow state that calls into question the monopoly to act held by local government<sup>36</sup>.

Similarly, the particular ways in which Food Not Bombs dispenses food aid opens up a space to create a radical alternative to neoliberal methods of aiding the poor. A key practice of Food Not Bombs is that food is publicly shared with *anyone* who may show up. They do not have a prerequisite that one must be homeless nor do they rely on assumptions or constructions about who the poor are, unlike that of the shelter system. Unlike the shelter system, FNBLV is not interested in classifying individuals as “homeless” as a precursor to aiding them. More specifically, *Food Not Bombs is not concerned with sorting populations* into categories of “deserving/undeserving;” those that show up to eat do not have to agree to any course of remediation or rehabilitation, nor confess their deficiencies, real or imagined. The emphasis on confession is a linchpin of neoliberal antipoverty efforts, especially in the faith-based initiatives that proliferate near homeless populations (Hackworth, 2010). Such confessions serve to inscribe a set of power relations that privilege the “charitable” over the “recipient.” FNBLV and PA’s refusal to undergird care with confession is connected to a broader politics that works to blur and eliminate forced social categorizations and hierarchies.

Garces, an FNBLV activist, connected ideas about charity and space in talking about the importance of the FNB way of doing activism:

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<sup>36</sup> It is on this point that Varsanyi (2008) realizes the importance of Mitchell's work. On one hand, “many on the progressive left” have chosen to “dismiss 'rights talk'” for more normative arguments on rights to the city (p41). But to Varsanyi, Mitchell convincingly argues that “rights matter” because they establish important ideals against which we can hold government accountable, and social movements can use this as a strategic line of attack.

It is so very grassroots, it's like literally, you're *in the grass* with people! That's what draws me. I worked with [a large faith-based shelter] for a while, they're a vast organization. They need help, but it's not the same, you don't feel like you're hands on, you're not there with the people. Also, I really like the attitude of Food Not Bombs – we're just out there having a picnic with the people. We're not out there bestowing our largesse on them or anything, because that's not what it's all about. I feel like [with FNBLV] we're all in it together. And we *are* all in it together, so I feel like it's important for that feeling to be generated (personal comm., July 25, 2012).

The implication in the above statement is that part of the work of FNBLV is that it is a rejection of institutionalized charity. That is, an individual can be “with the people” because of the model of food sharing and that it happens specifically in a public space. This activist also discussed her time as a volunteer with a large shelter, and found that it didn't speak to her in ways that FNBLV did:

You were handing a person a bowl of soup or whatever. You weren't the same thing as, you know, sitting and talking to someone and being part of *their* scene as they are part of yours. It made them seem like 'the other.' That's the thing that bothered me (personal comm., July 25, 2012, emphasis original).

This activist suggests that multiple claims on space are being engaged in, in that both activists and homeless persons might claim a given public space and that the relation of the picnic is such that a common “scene” is created from that activity. Distinctions between “giver” and “taker” dissolve into non-hierarchical notions of community and friendship.

Similarly, In discussing her initial discovery of FNBLV, Bridger, an FNBLV activist recalls:

That's why I was so attracted to FNB. It was at a time that I was letting go of that old “oh, there are people that are victims in the world and they need things.” The haves and have nots, the victims and the victors. So, when was finding my own spirituality, detaching from those old belief systems, [I found FNBLV] because

of their ideology, that just being human, you deserve food. It's not a handout, it's respect. Giving and receiving food is a respectful thing to do as a human being, everyone deserves food. I love that (personal comm., July 25, 2012)!

This quote delineates a political reading of FNBLV by one of its members. Here, a political economy-based critique of intervening in antagonistic struggles of "haves and have nots" is eschewed. Instead, Bridger articulates a different reading of her place in activism in that it builds an agonistic politics of care and solidarity. That is, deservingness isn't tied to the contingencies of one's position in an economy, but rather is universal and inherent to being human.

The particular affective spaces of FNBLV picnics serve to further the politics of solidarity. In discussions and interviews with food sharing activists, the making, even if briefly, of safe and friendly spaces was seen as a central – or perhaps *the* central – consequence of the picnics<sup>37</sup>. Stewart enthusiastically agreed, adding his opinion of the weekly picnics:

I think it's the community. If you just pulled up [at the curb] somewhere [to hand out food] people just take their stuff and leave. It's not just the same as charity. [...] it's about building relationships. People coming to public spaces, sharing, learning they can trust one another and help one another, and strength coming out of that (personal comm., July 26, 2012).

Garces explicitly articulated the ability to stop, sit and talk at public space picnics as a spatial (and temporal) strategy that allows for community and communication. She added

<sup>37</sup> In my own collaborative work at the picnics, as I entered the field to work with FNBLV, I assumed that the food we shared with the hungry would be the justification and use for the picnic. But, as I became a regular at the picnics, it became apparent that it wasn't so much the material impact of the food, but the affective politics of being treated with kindness and "normalcy" that FNBLV was offering. While I am not elevating the experience of being lonely and somewhat broke in a strange city with that of homelessness, nonetheless the real impact of FNBLV is that we all sat down together and talked. This simple act allowed the arbitrariness of "activist" or "homeless" to dissolve and be reconstituted as friendship.

as an example that during Occupy Las Vegas the camp model allowed for information sharing and mutual aid; in one case, a young family was able to find out how to procure medical care by others in the camp.

This question of trust is one that Springer (2012) argues is a question geographers are well-equipped to interrogate. The anarchist-infused, non-hierarchical ways that FNBLV and PA carry out their activism are oriented "towards the issue of building trust, by shattering prejudices and intervening with creative new energies rooted in the nurturing capacity of emotion and everyday life as the actual terrains of human interaction." (p1616). I will turn to two examples of trust and how these examples have a bearing on the spatialities of care. In one particular interview, a local official recounted a question asked by a group of local ministers:

...a lot of my role is of course doing that outreach piece, and I've gone a group of ministers [...]. They've said "[W]hat are some of the biggest needs?" And I've said, well of course, identification. Because, I mean, if people have identification that's valid [whistles], that's like 90% of helping them. If they don't have it, it's like, such a negative (personal comm., July 2, 2012).

This is the deployment of an affective politics that needs to verify the legitimacy of individual humanity, rooted in a Reaganesque emotional logic of "trust but verify." Or, to parallel the case of homeless service provision, "care but surveil." Ostensibly, services and aid cannot be delivered without first creating surveillable (through the production, tracking and recording of identifying data) subjects. This, of course, is the logic that creates securitized spaces of the shelter, yet is a logic that emerges from specific emotional commitments. For shelter administrators, if there's a deep trust in the relationship between care and service and homeless individuals, it's that trust is sited in

disciplinary programs that create the norms individuals are measured against. Lost in this calculation is the ability to trust that homeless individuals can make decisions about the types of help and aid that are useful and relevant in their own lives, and that caring individuals can be creative and careful<sup>38</sup> enough to successfully aid others.

On the other hand, my earlier example of carrying the soup kettle is the enactment of an opposite spatiality. In that particular moment – the "here and now" that Springer (2013) points to as the vital moments of resistance – the lines of distinction between "helper" and "recipient" blur. This was further made explicit while interviewing Carson (an FNBLV activist) during a picnic. The conversation briefly turned to identification. A regular picnic attendee was nearby, interestedly listening to our conversation. He remarked on the ridiculousness of the concept of identification, particularly as it relates to its requirement for the dispensation of aid: "So you have to be born into the state before you're born in to yourself?" Carson replied to the man's question, by asking an additional question: "I just don't know why they don't understand that we're alive! We're - we were born, right?" "Not if you don't have a birth certificate, you can't prove you were born!" was the man's response.

The point to this exchange was that the particular ways that FNBLV enacted care were ways that chose to trust those who show up at the picnics. The lack of demands or quid pro quo on those showing up to eat signify the politics of solidarity and equality that FNBLV espouse. Further, the willingness to allow the boundaries of "helper" and "recipient" to be blurred (Carson and others allowed "the homeless" to take items from

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<sup>38</sup> I mean "careful" in multiple senses: the capacity to empathize with the plight of others, the willingness to intervene from a sense of empathy, and with the practical attention to the tasks of aiding that reasonably protects the health and safety of all involved.

their vehicles and bring them to the picnic area) are the un/conscious moments of resistance to the biopolitical imperatives of classification. In other words, the politics and practices of FNBLV and PA are built upon the assumption that it's not just a better world, but friendship that is possible. Indeed, friendship operates precisely as a radical vision of prefigurative politics, where the creation of safe spaces enables the forging of social networks premised upon care, intimacy, and mutual aid (Valentine, 1993; Bunnell, et al., 2012; de Leeuw, Cameron, Greenwood, 2012).

These linkages become even more important in those communities deemed abnormal and given to the public's pathologizing gaze. For instance, Bunnell, et al. (2012) recount Peake's (2010) study of queer communities in Guyana, noting that the spatialities of safety-through-friendship "are essential to physical and mental well-being and long-term survival" (p499). They recount other studies of the affective spaces of queer geographies in the Global South where it is precisely the production of friendly social spaces that allows for the time and space and opportunity to "think through notions of solidarity" (Bunnell, et al., p499). Through this prism, more attention is needed to connect the practices of conviviality to homeless people's "geographies of survival" (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009). Deference to (statist) authority melts away, and the enactment of community and mutual aid takes its place.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I focus on two ad hoc food sharing organizations: Food Not Bombs Las Vegas (FNBLV) and Project Aqua (PA). Through an extended collaborative



ethnography, I find that these organizations conceive of their work not just as providing food to hungry individuals, but also in situating hunger and the provision of care in expressly political and spatial terms. Politically, individuals involved with these organizations articulate an awareness that “the homeless” are particularly vulnerable to multiple subject formations that produce multiple policy effects and influence the range of government and shelter services available (or not) to homeless individuals.

This recognition leads to an articulation that one role of FNBLV and PA is that their picnics and food sharing activities erode the biopolitical concepts that undergird homeless subject formations. Further, FNBLV and PA members articulate the desire to create safe spaces in parks and streets where individuals can “hang out” or “be in each other's scene.” That is, food provision is not just a material undertaking that nourishes the bodies of hungry people - it also produces an affective space that salves the spirits and of the lonely by extending conviviality, and the pathologized by offering the gift of, even for just a time, being "normal." Therefore, I argue that the particular implication that food sharing picnics uncover is that the local state's assaults upon food sharing constitute an attempt at a deep form of domination that seeks to disassemble these informal, visible, caring networks.

Additionally, there is a nuanced spatiality that FNBLV and PA engage in. While many social movements engage in the claiming of space as a particular strategy in securing a broader voice in the public, I argue here that such antagonistic strategies are less central to FNBLV and PA's work. Instead, these organizations practice a more agonistic politics where visibility is strategically deployed in ways that don't demand something be done about homelessness or hunger; rather, the fleeting moments of the

picnic as safe, convivial spaces is used to show that “the homeless” exist, have needs, aren't dangerous and can freely enter into relations of care with other individuals.

I would like to make one additional argument about the politics of visibility launched by FNBLV and its relation to both the "service resistance" and the broader performances of agency on the part of those homeless individuals that eat at the picnics. Sparks (2010) makes the excellent and much-needed observation that while the literature fixates on the various ways government and activists and policies work to make "the homeless" visible to the state and the polity, it leaves homeless individuals' methods and desires for privacy unaddressed. That is, the ways in which "the homeless" actively resist being counted, surveilled and calculated are largely ignored by geographers. In this vein, the work of FNBLV and Project Aqua are quite apropos. On the one hand, these activists are attempting to make their acts of aid visible to the broader public by engaging in mutual aid and solidarity in open, public spaces. But, on the other hand, the sharing of food and water and companionship and the brief moments of intimacy that punctuate these exchanges are specifically relevant and tailored to the lifeways of the "service resistant."

That is, what *specifically enables those to reject the shelters and reclaim some semblance of privacy* is to have FNBLV's forms of mutual aid and Project Aqua's dispensations of streetside, ad hoc care available. These acts of aid are also antidisciplinary, in that they are unconcerned with the logics of biopolitical improvement; food is simply made available and shared with whomever may show up; no categorizations of "giver" and "recipient" are made explicit (though they do exist to some extent; there are regulars in attendance who eat, and regulars who provide the food). This

creates a situation in which homeless individuals are made visible through FNBLV's picnics, but not in ways that necessarily and readily make individuals visible according to the public's "pathologizing gaze" *as* homeless (Sparks, 2010, p843).

Finally, I would like to offer a speculation on the implications of this chapter's reading of the agonistic politics of food sharing. In this chapter, I argued that FNBLV's spatial strategies are less motivated by claiming space, and as such, claiming entry into a broader public. Rather, I read FNBLV as more interested in assembling space; in using it to reconceptualize the public as an informed, caring humanity doing the constant work of erasing processes and structures of hierarchy and domination. This framework informs a strategy that uses public space to visibly practice agonistic politics that seek to explode biopolitical notions and categorizations of "homeless" or "citizen" or "volunteer" by openly forging sociable, friendly, non-hierarchical networks of care that join multiple differently-situated subjects.

This, incidentally, lends itself to a particular analysis of solidarity, reading it in ways that might overcome Purcell's (2013) "question that preoccupies much of contemporary left political theory:" that of how to meld various, particular local movements in ways that don't lead to reductionism, but allow for such disparate groups to articulate shared difficulty (p562). I would like to suggest that starting with Foucault's assertion that the tie that binds humanity is that we are all – whether good or bad, ineffective or responsive – governed. This links seemingly disparate struggles: when a concerned individual cannot share food with the hungry wherever and whenever that hunger presents itself, when a worker's ability to associate with his or her coworkers in order to collectively bargain with their employer to negotiate the conditions of their labor,

or when a transgendered individual cannot make one's own decision of which restroom is appropriate without interference from legislative bodies or social shame, anger, disrespect and fear, these can all be joined as assaults of governance on our own capacity to act on behalf of our own – and others' – lives. In this sense, we are all joined and others' struggles are our own.

#### CHAPTER 4: THE NECROPOLITICAL MOMENT

*In point of fact, these systems always assumed that there were not two kinds of crimes, but two kinds of criminals: those who can be corrected by punishment, and those who could never be corrected even if they were punished indefinitely. The death penalty was the definitive punishment for the incorrigibles, and in a form so much shorter and surer than perpetual imprisonment.... (Foucault, 2000, p460)*

Following the analyses presented in Chapters 2 and 3, I argue that the particular politics of homelessness that contextualize debates over food sharing within the categorization of the service resistant homeless population is best read through the analytical framework of necropower, a framework that reads particular moments in the exercise of sovereign power working to destroy life and to turn certain populations into "the living dead" (Mbembe, cited in Höller, 2002, no page). To that end, this chapter will present a full discussion of this project's the third overarching research question:

*Why has there been additional emphasis on moving from attacking “the homeless” to attacking those who would feed the homeless? What does it mean when the local state and the shelterplex take to warning, harassing and frustrating the ad hoc feeding of homeless individuals all while failing to offer relevant care for the service resistant?*

After considering the broader neoliberal, biopolitical and necropolitical contexts of local state actions against FNBLV, more questions emerge at the contextual, theoretical site of conflict in the politics of food sharing. I argue that underlying both local state action and activist resistance – not to mention the so-called service resistance of the homeless themselves – are discursive distinctions between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor and hungry. These frameworks seek to legitimize and naturalize the political projects of the liberal state and its craft: to define, to judge and to act upon populations.

Drawing from literatures on critical poverty studies, this chapter analyzes the nuanced language used by the public and nonprofit sectors in service to this distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, or put in other terms, those who can't and won't help themselves. This distinction is crucial to make, as there are legitimate questions to be raised as to whether or not assaults against food sharing are done in the context of revanchism and the disciplining of homeless bodies, or if some other logic of sorting and/or subject-making is the principal aim of the local state.

My argument here is that the creation of the category of the "service resistant" allows for a break in municipal practices of care and programming of and for the homeless. Not all homeless persons are subject to the same forms of state violence; for instance, chronically homeless men are treated through different mechanisms of state power and control and discipline than homeless families with children, who are in turn differently situated and conceptualized than single women with children (Fraser, 1987). Instead, those marked with being mentally ill or deviant and intransigent face an increasingly destructive and disruptive set of actions by the local state. In other words, the rays of intransigence, subject-making, biopolitics and necropolitics trace the boundaries of a state of exception in how municipal and regional governments in Las Vegas intervene in the problems of homelessness.

With respect to spatiality, Chapter 3 connects the specific ways that FNBLV assembles and re-uses space to a broader strategy of opening up new ways of contesting neoliberalism's disciplinary regime and its deployments of sovereignty. In particular, this analysis pulled apart two apropos expressions of power – “sovereignty” and “discipline” – to articulate how FNBLV's multiple activisms oscillate between intervening in spatial

claims and subject-making depending upon the types of power it is objecting. FNBLV's deployment of space is a tactic that allows it to enact a certain anti-disciplinary social relations; food is shared with a common humanity, asking nothing of those that would eat. This is done in spaces that serve (to varying degrees) two purposes: to make both the toll of human poverty visible to the broader public and to openly practice caring, radical friend-making in ways that envision the erasure of distrust, colonizing processes, governmentality and populations (Valentine, 1993; Bunnell, et al., 2012; de Leeuw, Cameron, Greenwood, 2012).

In doing this, I argued that FNBLV aims to assemble space rather than merely claim it. FNBLV's spatial practices of sociability and conviviality are launched in response to the disciplinary regimes of care practiced by the shelterplex. At the same time, solidarity, mutual aid and friendship are deployed with the sharing of food in a key ways that underscore the politics of hunger and homelessness in Las Vegas. First, the openness of ad hoc care as practiced by FNBLV and PA are structured by the commitment to democracy and creativity - anyone may intervene in hunger by helping in ways that are amenable to both the "helper" and the "helped." This produces networks and spaces of care that act in ways contrary to that of tightly-circumscribed local state and shelterplex notions of care that entomb and enclose particular notions of care into particular times and particular spaces. Second, ad hoc groups such as FNBLV and PA conceptualize their work, practically speaking, as particularly aiding those who don't engage with the shelter, thus linking ad hoc aid with ad hoc survival. Running parallel to this is the conceptualization of service resistance and the ways that the local state acts to encourage homeless individuals' engagement with the shelter system.

Emerging from this context, in this chapter I argue that particular *necropolitical* logics hold sway as a way of understanding local government and nonprofit interventions in the lives of homeless individuals. On one hand, local government and the shelter system alike understand what they term homeless services (or, more simply, care for homeless persons) through rational, biopolitical programs such as soft-skills job training, financial literacy classes, sobriety programs. On the other hand, the state apparatus also oscillates between the impulse to improve and the impulse to hurt and coerce. In other words, while I analyze local government responses to ad hoc food sharing through the dark rubric of necropolitics, this is not to say that the desire to harm or kill is the only impulse local officials are succumbing to. In fact, many of the local government officials I spoke to routinely expressed satisfaction at their charge of “helping the homeless,” and similarly expressed regret that they couldn't do more to help the “less fortunate.”

### **Theoretical frameworks**

#### *What is necropower?*

The particularities of Las Vegas provides a fulcrum where emerging ideas about necropower may pivot. Coined by postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe, necropower offers a challenge to Foucauldian notions of biopower. It refers to “the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, sovereign power imagines itself and is deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of deathscapes, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to the conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the living dead” (Mbembe, cited in Höller, 2002, no page).



Driscoll (2010) uses the analytic of necropower to re-read the “subaltern biopolitical subjectivities” of pre-WWII Imperial Japan that fueled the creation of a war-funding narco-economy and battlefield “comfort women” to prepare Japanese soldiers for death. Necropolitics – Mbembe holds that politics should now be viewed as *a form of war* – lurks in such places as the Atlantic slave trade, a death/prison-scape where “the border separating life and death become virtually indistinguishable” (Childs, 2009, p279). In the contemporary “developed” world, the “biopolitics of disposability” in the lead-up and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Giroux, 2006), and in British newspaper coverage of the 7/7 bombings, in which photographs of “victims” and “responders” were selected, displayed, and deployed in specific ways to “feed into the [readers’] necropolitical sovereignty that only certain lives are deemed worth caring about, and only then in very particular ways” (Rose, 2009, p53).

Wright (2011), in tracing the decades-long femicide plaguing Ciudad Juarez, adds that necropolitical theory supposes politics as war in which “the sovereign emerges through the determination of who dies or who does not die, and therefore, lives” (p709). Moving away from such a binary, Jessi Lee Jackson (2013) similarly considers the roles of gender and politics. In the context of the prison and recent legislation crafted to prevent prison rape, Jackson formulates necropower in much the same way that she asserts the expressions of gender; necropower and necropolitics operate not in lieu of, but alongside of biopower. For instance, Jackson asserts that while prisons operate through the biopolitics of discipline and reformation, they also extend necropower through targeting and marking the incarcerated for death, whether civic (disenfranchisement) or bodily (inadequate health care and HIV prevention). In other words, there is a continuum

of bio-necropower and politics that operates even on the same bodies or upon particular populations in some moments in the furtherance of life in certain ways, but in other moments serves to deny life. This is after all, literally taking into account the implication of the term "the living dead" (Mbembe, 2002).

That is, there are moments of biopower and moments of the necropolitical that play out for certain populations at particular times. Here, I argue that the perceived population of the service resistant are, in certain moments, extended the offer of biopolitical services, but are also coerced into accepting them by way of the necropolitical. The frustration of ad hoc methods of (self-)care, such as food sharing events or public restrooms or encampments serve to make life on the streets more dangerous or unsanitary, and the ways that these enhanced dangers are expressed is through marking the bodies of homeless individuals as the living dead (figuratively and literally).

Antishelter homeless who have no (self-imposed) responsibility to "experts," are exposed to dying – insofar as the discourse of government officials and shelter operators supposes. It's also worth noting that the view shared by local government officials and nonprofits on those who do *not* desire the help of shelters is remarkably clear and consistent: such individuals are mentally ill and so lack the ability to reason, and thus all the more effort is expended to "save" the antishelter homeless, often by dismantling their self-organized camps and (almost always unsuccessfully) lobbying the evicted to shift into the shelter system. Another tactic, as I will discuss later as a key intervention, is to deal with their "enablers."

As a governing technique, necropolitics comes to bear on the service resistant, antishelter homeless of Las Vegas through the discursive formation of “the streets” as an increasingly dangerous place. Assisting this rhetorical work is the oft-repeated assertion by local officials that food distributed by “street feeders” or activists such as FNBLV is untouched by expert hands: inherently unhealthy, unwholesome and unsafe. The act of survival eating itself becomes infused with danger, illness, injury and death through these discursive frames, necessitating local government regulation of “street feeders.” This regulation takes many forms, but as my informants tell it, is motivated by a pure desire to serve the “less fortunate” and to move their bodies into the circumscribed “safety” of the shelter.

However, in taking a cue from Foucault, and tracing power not through its motivations but through its effects, these very acts constitute a necropower relation – increasingly “dangerous” forms of aid necessitate the erasure of these forms of aid, thereby making it harder for the service resistant, antishelter homeless to survive. Here is where Mbembe is at his most relevant in this case study: *necropolitical deathscapes* are created through discourses contending that certain street-side foodways are inherently deadly or illness inducing. And while these necropolitics create specters of danger on the street, relations of necropower step in to spatially fix the homeless into the shelter system, in a manner not unlike that of “the camp.” At the same time, there is little optimism among local officials (as they *explicitly* expressed to me) that homelessness will be “solved.” Implicitly, the best the social service system can wish for is entomb the homeless into the care of endless shelter discipline; into catacombs populated by persons not quite (socially) dead and not quite living.

Finally, there is a markedly Machiavellian logic informing the types of local government intervention into homeless people's geographies of survival. While the existing geographic literature formulates necropolitics in the “developed” Western world as the deployment of sovereign state power making concrete, administrative decisions on “who lives” and “who dies,” I argue that necropolitics takes a different form among the homeless in Las Vegas. Local officials are not working in a manner that directly sentences particular homeless individuals to death. Rather, the form and shape of the (shadow) social service state is constru(ct)ed in a way to *create an environment* conducive to deterring service resistance.

While “the law” is oft-critiqued as a truncheon wielded on behalf of the elite and propertied, the opposite can occasionally occur: in Las Vegas, “the law” is precisely what blocked direct ordinances outlawing FNBLV's food sharing in city parks (Hooper, 2010). It's perhaps no coincidence that, having lost the ability to nakedly restrict such activities, local officials reformulate the reaches of power in ways that lead to an unmasking of the local state's “truer” intentions. While broad criticisms of Las Vegas's “anti-feeding” ordinance(s) pronounced the city to be against homelessness – or at least in not wanting to see them in public parks – the ways in which regional officials intervene in ad hoc care in the post-ban milieu beg the question that it isn't as much homelessness, but service resistance that local government opposes.

Finally, these reaches of power are not born from a singular desire to harm and assault. In a region beset by pervasive and deep economic woes such as unemployment, home foreclosures and municipal budget crunches, regional officials are quick to point

out that “doing more<sup>39</sup> with less” means that the homeless have ever-increasing options for “getting help.” But the service resistant homeless also face quicker evictions from camps by “Rapid Response” teams and stomachs go emptier from efforts that frustrate attempts to distribute food and water in parks and streets. And perhaps the *coup de grâce* is that the service resistant homeless are increasingly referred to as “mentally ill,” setting in motion a process for local government to pathologize resistance as an individual illness unable to recognize the waiting, expert help of the shelterplex.”

And of course, this is perhaps the ultimate in psychological violence: the assertion that, as a result of resisting being governed in unhelpful ways, the harm felt by any one of us for simply choosing to live in relevance and self-respect is no one's fault but our own.

*On biopower and its discontents*

Foucault (1984) points out that the “characteristic privileges” of pre-modern sovereign powers were that they could *directly* decide their subjects’ rights to life or death (p258). However, the project of modernization has served to blur the rights of the sovereign. Sovereigns, through modernization, give way to states, and the direct right to decide the viability of life is (ostensibly) tamed by a juridicial system of (again, ostensibly) rational law and bureaucracy and economy and disciplines that together serve at the pleasure of the state. The state now has an indirect right to decide who shall live, but now through its “numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (p262).

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<sup>39</sup> A cliché oft-used in any bureaucracy, for sure, but the formulation of doing *more* with less shouldn't be glossed over. There is a difference between that phrase and “doing the same with less.” Doing more is, after all, ostensibly based on a desire to do *more* for people officials assume are “in their care.”

The concern with furthering life – and the quality of it – is not to conceptualize biopower as a single-mindedly optimistic enterprise. The dark side to biopower is that the state’s zeal to protect life *at the level of the population* is precisely what allows the dispensation of death to those *outside of* the population. The point of the discourse on “quality of life” is to tie together the state’s work of improving lives-as-populations with specific techniques and institutions. Foucault notes that as the institutions and techniques of biopower become more pervasive and are aided by parallel developments in technology (such as the atomic bomb and the resulting policy of Mutually Assured Destruction), and colonialism (especially its racism<sup>40</sup>), “wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity” becomes more possible and more common (p260).

However, for Foucault, these dreams of genocide often operate implicitly. Connecting to my own research, the legal mechanisms used to restrict the “geographies of survival” (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009) of homeless individuals, coupled with an increasingly militant stance against public displays of food sharing that make individual aid to the homeless a crime (Butler and McHenry, 1992) are challenging that notion of implicitness. Quality of life assaults on “loitering” or panhandling are couched in terms of correcting bad, poverty-enabling behavior. But, Food Not Bombs (FNB) takes the tactical approach of sharing food in public. This forces the state to focus its energy and discourse to publicly prohibit people from *eating*. This draws the state out of its comfort

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<sup>40</sup> See especially Foucault (2003) for a well-articulated connection between race, biopower and death. Here, Foucault asks how the power to kill could possibly be expressed in disciplinary power, since disciplinary power is premised on the furtherance of life and of making life live in certain ways. Foucault argues that “race” and racism intervene by introducing a “break between what must live and what must die” (p254). The common mass of humanity is, through “race,” broken into a hierarchy of races with some “described as good” and others “described as inferior” (p255). Similarly, in the case of homeless individuals, a common homelessness is, through various disciplinary knowledges and medicalizations, similarly broken into “good” homelessneses such as veterans or the physically disabled, and “inferior” homelessneses such as drug users or those deemed lazy or shiftless.

zone: it cannot use the convenient arguments of “tough love” deployed for the ultimate benefit of the poor, but instead must adopt a position that people cannot gather to eat in the place and manner of their choosing.

As Foucault (2003) notes, the nature of power and statecraft have undergone a shift from the latter half of the eighteenth century. Where sovereign powers struggled to address the problem of the epidemic, which threatened to sap the territory of the productive power of its people (by infecting particular, individual bodies), the introduction of demography and modern medicine congealed in ways that theorized that the *endemic* must also be increasingly addressed. This new preoccupation with the endemic lead to a shift in the administration of power from individual bodies to populations.

Endemics, after all, were the ways in which illness was ever-present and lying-in-wait at the level of population. In response, infrastructures and policies could be created that made a population less apt to be culled by the threat of illness and disease. In this light, power's focus shifted to *people-as-a-population*, not necessarily of people as individual bodies. Sovereign power came to see death differently, as well. As Foucault surmises, death was “no longer something that swooped down on life,” but in concerning itself with endemics, death was now something “permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it, and weakens it” (p244).

So, in managing populations, death and failure are always at the door like so many zombies. The public health is constantly bedeviled by ambient viruses lying in wait. Security regimes suppose that criminals and terrorists always lurk in the shadows. Political dissidence and critical thinking threaten the clueless, ignorant pleasure of

capitalist life. A “sense of entitlement” and shiftlessness erodes deference to sociopolitical moral authorities. The people, *as a mass*, must be “improved” in order to combat these threats to the moral authority of the state. When states can successfully argue the case of social interventions as “improvement,” these acts, regimes and programs become the legitimate expressions of sovereign power.

The presence of food sharing activities and its relation to “service resistant” or intransigent homeless bodies, as Foucault put it, gnaws at Las Vegas officials. Conflicts between those that would feed the hungry and the local state are inherently conflicts over life and death. Eating is perhaps the most fundamental act in order to live (Heynen, 2006, 2009, 2010); to deny the right to loiter is not to directly curtail the right to live an easily-understood or easy-to-see way. However, the denial of food is plainly, directly, and intuitively to deny life and its sustenance. Because FNBLV's food sharing occurs in public space, this denial of life is brought out into the open and crosscut with questions about who the public is, how we classify it, who is “in” and who is “out,” and how the decision to exclude some populations from conceptions of “the public” are direct and simple issues of life and death. At the heart of this question (and indeed, my research) is a bare argument: discourses can kill.

On an abstract level, there are connections between necropolitical death-worlds and food sharing in the US. Heynen (2010) reports on the matrix of federal investigations focused upon groups that are active in food sharing (such as Food Not Bombs). In one particular investigation, Long Beach (California) police had focused their surveillance on an “infoshop” that was known to host meetings of a local chapter of FNB. As a spokesperson for the Long Beach police later explained, “particularly after September 11



– people expect that [the surveillance of anarchist and activist groups] now. *We wouldn't be doing our jobs if we weren't investigating that type of group*" (quoted in Ehrenreich, 2002, p17, cited in Heynen, 2010, p1231, emphasis mine). In another instance, the FBI had presented to the University of Texas Law School an argument that anti-war activism was linked to terrorism. In their presentation, the FBI had reasoned that FNB, in particular, was a group that "terrorists might consort with" (Boykoff, 2007, p279).

A key connection here is that the *deathscape* of September 11 is the discursive ground with which the technologies of harassment were initially unleashed and take root against FNB. The post-9/11 security state is an exercise of power that has death not as its end, but as its starting point. The connection of FNB to terror networks is to suggest that threats they pose to society are as severe as those from terrorists. As Baudrillard surmises, the "secret" of security is that it "*surround[s] you with a sarcophagus in order to prevent you from dying*" (1993, p177, emphasis original). To use an explicitly urban example, "security" must first convince us that we are always under threat; that we are exposed to danger, that we are insecure. The project of security promises that enhanced surveillance, CCTV cameras, the expansion of prisons, the banishment of undesirables from space, and, finally, legal doctrines beseeching armed sovereign citizens to "stand their ground" against any perceived outside threat will deliver us from disorder.

To pursue a program of security – for instance, to act against any activity, such as food sharing, that might "attract" homeless people – is to accept the premise that the slightest acts of disorder will enable petty misbehaviors to fester into full-blown endemics of anarchy. Broken windows, the argument goes, are sinister signs of bigger

things to come<sup>41</sup>. This context of (in)security is exploited by discourses that cleave “deserving” homeless populations from intransigent and undisciplined “undeserving” homeless populations. If undeserving populations are apparently unwilling to even respect their own lives by seeking to improve them, we are led to believe, what will this population do to others? And more precisely, to “us” the “public?” And it is because of this that activists such as FNBLV are being laid bare by the state practices of mutilating public space and cutting the homeless out of it. While, on its face, it seems questionable that FNBLV should be caught up in the new post-9/11 geopolitics of anti-terrorism (what does a group handing out food on the town square have to do with Al-Qaeda?), the link becomes clearer when thinking about FNBLV's place as an organization that threatens a particular view of territory, sovereignty, and security in a disciplinary city.

With these examples, I argue that the tenets of biopower are not a sufficient framework with which to understand the assaults against the geographies of survival. Instead, the technologies of law and spatial containment – for the undeserving poor – are fixated upon death. What follows is an account of how the anti-management of Las Vegas's intransigent human bodies that eschew the shelter system and its disciplinary mechanisms are, by virtue of Goodman's desert refugee camps and increasing crackdowns on food sharing, best theorized as emerging urban state practices of necropower. And, if necropower is, in fact, an unfolding method of urban governance, this will cause us to rethink the role of “neoliberalism” and political economy in urban governance.

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<sup>41</sup> For a critique of Wilson and Kelling's (1982) "broken windows" theory, see Brown and Herbert, 2009. For a critique of "the bigger things to come" from broken windows – namely, the punitive city – see Beckett and Herbert, 2009.

Further, the material consequences of necropower, I will argue, act in ways that make living “rough” on the street *more* dangerous, *more* risky, *more* prone to being rousted and scattered by the police and having one's belongings confiscated and destroyed (again, by the police). There's also a liberal sprinkling of rhetorical sorcery at hand: the conjuring of what *becomes* dangerous, unsanitary food handed out by “street feeders.” These discourses of care gone awry are first meant as a (not at all successful, as it turns out) scare tactic to discourage people on the street from eating food handed out on the street and secondly to shame those ad hoc groups who *do* the “feeding.”

So, there's a double work being done in that the coerced collaboration between municipalities and the private sector are certainly creating more opportunities to dispense so-called proper care, but also that the *dangers of homelessness are being enhanced* specifically as a way to (“hopefully,” from “official” point of view) shunt people into the shelter system. It is in *this* context, I argue, where a necropoliticized analysis provides a useful reading of contemporary urban governing logics. After all, at the end of the day, the service resistant are likely to do just that – resist – and these enhanced dangers of the street are thus setting them up as sacrificial.

Further, it's worth making it explicit that those who find themselves outside of biopolitical care are described by nonprofit administrators and government officials as the “service resistant.” This term does the conceptual work of making injury, harm and death on the street no one's fault but the resistant's. After all, from this perspective, what is being resisted is an offer of help from “expert” bureaucrats and “compassionate” nonprofits. However, this discursive strategy leaves out the possibility that the offer of aid itself is deficient. Those who do not engage with the “traditional” or “proper” shelter

system refuse these, because the system offers them nothing of benefit. This is a failure of statecraft to meaningfully and respectfully address the needs of those who strive for a life independent of the demands of government (paperwork preceding programming) and capital (work preceding property) and faith (damnation preceding salvation) and, indeed, bourgeois society (responsibility preceding sacrifice).

### **Necrocity Vegas**

Specifically as it relates to the tangle of law, life and death, there's a delicate dance going on in Las Vegas. Much of the existing geographic literature on homeless policy and politics in the neoliberal city tends to emphasize revanchism (Davis, 1990, Smith, 1996; Mitchell, 1997; McLeod, 2002) and the punitive focus of service agendas (Katz, 1989; Schram, 2000, Mitchell, 2011; for the connection to death and war, MacLeavy and Peoples, 2009). Without minimizing the real violence - both spectacular and mundane - perpetrated against the vulnerable, in this chapter I argue that there are alternative analytics than punishment and sneering, neoliberalist cruelty. Indeed, my research reveals that the impulse to “help” is oft-articulated among local officials.

The assumed revanchist and neoliberal city is, I argue, better conceptualized as a *disciplinary* city that aims to engage its homeless population with myriad services. From interviews with local officials and homeless service administrators, this is done under the rubric of intransigent homeless individuals systematically pathologized as “mentally ill” and non-compliant. It is perhaps the transformation of the distinction between “deserving/undeserving” homeless to that of the “homeless/service resistant” that has led to a similar shift in “hard-edged” tactics that criminalized homelessness to the “softer”

tactics that see local government working to frustrate the ability for service resistant homeless persons to receive food, water and other care outside of the shelter system. It is in these processes of the active limiting of care that the necropolitical resides.

For instance, in my wide-ranging discussions with nonprofit homeless service administrators and local government officials alike, particular buzzwords, policy visions, rationalities and affective responses arise to explain why the local state intervenes in the lives of the homeless in the ways they do in ways virtually unfolding from the pages of more recent calls for nuance in reading the coercion/care divide (Doherty, et. al., 2008; Laurenson and Collins, 2007; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2010; Daya and Wilkins, 2012). Or, as these accounts conceptualize it, coercion and care are not necessarily binary poles, but rather enacted as an ambiguous continuum. Indeed, my witnessing of homeless policy and practice in Las Vegas was oft-choreographed as a dance between enacting “proper” care on one hand and coercive calculation on the other. After all, just as capitalism oscillates between binary drives of “creative destruction” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; see also Peck, 2010), neoliberalism between “roll-out, roll-back” (Peck and Tickell, 2002), so too does biopoliticized compassion offer both palliatives and punishment. Even in the face of economic recession – more severe in Las Vegas than in many other parts of the US – the local government stretches its own budgets, resources and labor in working to expand homeless services.

While this chapter – and, indeed, this project – arises from a spirited defense of the right for people to nonviolently live as they will without interference and coercion from those who would tell us what we owe to ourselves and others (see Graeber, 2012 for a polemic), I also argue that power dynamics on the streets, parks, shelters and bureaus of

Las Vegas have shifted in ways that challenge and complicate the terrain of geographic debate.

For instance, Mitchell and Heynen (2009) catalog myriad ways in which homeless people's on-street lifeways are under systematic disruption and assault from *laws* that seek to punish the homeless for being homeless. As they assert, borrowing from Don Mitchell's (1997) earlier work, ordinances and laws take on a “potentially 'genocidal'” bent, as they conspire “to eliminate all those spaces in which a homeless person can be” (p614). The authors make a second point, in that scholars shouldn't read the power relations tied into law and space and property as a “one-way story of oppression [...] but also a story of coping [...] and of fighting back” (p613). While heartily affirming the proud agency of homeless persons in the face of incomprehensible assaults, I argue that such disruptions to homeless people's “geographies of survival” don't spring *solely* from a desire to harm as an explicit starting point by which urban governance starts. Instead, local government officials and nonprofit shelter administrators were eager to describe their various interventions in the lifeways of the homeless as “getting them services” and otherwise “helping the homeless.” It is in this vein that Johnsen and Fitzpatrick (2010) leave some room for negotiation and issue a much-needed call for “on-the-ground ethnographic research” (p615) to fill in the gaps of knowledge in the geographic literature (and imagination) regarding urban governance, homeless policy, use of force and homeless people's methods of survival and coping.

In my conversations with local government officials and nonprofit homeless service administrators of homeless policy and response on the ground in Las Vegas, these informants suggest a certain lurking duplicity as it relates to wielding “potentially

genocidal” (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009) force. The local state, as those whom I interviewed explained, makes every effort to provide care, compassion and services for homeless individuals. At the same time, some individuals are deemed “service resistant” and do not want to engage with traditional, biopolitical methods of self-improvement. This, without fail, is attributed to mental illness. At the same time, local jurisdictions have a reduced capacity to *forcibly* institutionalize the “service resistant,” and are increasingly embargoed from *arbitrarily* preventing “group feeds” in parks and other public spaces. It was with some exasperation that local officials brought up roadblocks to the effective “care” of the homeless; “constitutional issues” and court battles *affirmed* the right of groups like FNBLV to use the city's parks to share food with the homeless, even if city officials think these activities are misguided. To remedy this, local government in Las Vegas has switched to alternative tactics, aiming to co-opt or frustrate more informal, ad hoc dispensations of care<sup>42</sup>. That is, the local state aims to make homelessness more dangerous as a *deterrent* to “service resistant” intransigence.

It is precisely this process, I argue, where both discipline and necropower take hold of those homeless who choose to live lives on the streets and on their own terms.

*What's the matter with Joe? Necropolitics on the streets*

Before I launch into this chapter's analysis of the necropolitical undertones of local interventions in homelessness and food provision, I will briefly trace the particular moment that the homeless of Las Vegas find themselves in. First, while I support tent cities and self-organized homeless encampments and cast a generally jaundiced eye to shelter-centric homeless policies, I also do not intend to minimize the danger that *does*

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<sup>42</sup> This is not to suggest that the “service resistant” and/or their settlements are free from police harassment.

exist on the streets of Las Vegas. Indeed, even the elements themselves foment a slow death. My fieldwork took place in Las Vegas in the late spring to mid-summer of 2012, where temperatures were routinely above 100 degrees coupled with a UV index above 10. It is not uncommon for the overnight *low* temperature to stay in the 90s. Living under the desert sun is a dangerous proposition; I have seen shockingly advanced burns on many homeless persons' exposed extremities.

Of course, the police routinely dismantle people's tents and otherwise rouse them from their ad hoc shelters, meaning the local state has some complicity in producing "feral" bodies (Wright, 1997; Sparks, 2010). The public presence of wounded, scarred, burnt bodies carries its own undeniable necropolitical overtones: the presence of wounded bodies are used by government and nonprofit officials to deter some acts and encourage others. Just as the "wounded warrior" is cleverly used as a form to reinscribe political discourses from antiwar to pro-soldier (and to thus reinsert the narrative of war-making and readiness into civic life), the material of the scarred, injured homeless body is similarly exploited as a rhetorical device. In this case, the broken bodies of the intransigent homeless – produced through various abandonments of biopolitical governance – used to both warn and deter the homeless: "Get help now" and avoid a similar fate.

It also justifies the role of the state to intervene ("We have a duty to help") in the lifeways of jurisdictional bodies. This is clearly an example of wounded bodies used as a way to create an epistemological space where discourse about the state turns back on itself. The failure of the state to care for its citizens – "proved" by their wounded,



starving bodies – necessitates further, more intrusive state interventions in the lives of those on the street.

Even still, this desire to intervene is also launched in contradictory and unsure ways. This is often instigated by the increasingly blurriness of legal rulings that balance the public interest in regulating public space with the rights of the homeless to have some autonomy over their own bodies. As Oakey<sup>43</sup> expressed his frustration to me, even if Congress were to award unlimited funds to address homelessness in his jurisdiction, other issues would crop up, namely "civil rights and service resistance" (personal comm., July 19, 2012).

The official then recalls an episode during a regional homeless outreach effort and acts out a dialogue that once occurred between himself and a homeless person that he refers to as "Joe:"

"C'mon Joe, c'mon in, get something to eat, get some shelter," whatever [else you may want]. And Joe's like "well, can I bring my dog? Can I bring this or my stuff?" And we're like, "No" (personal comm., July 19, 2012).

The official recounts "Joe's" reaction in a dismissive-to-his-helpers, thanks-but-no-thanks tone: "OK, I'm fine." Immediately after relaying this conversation, the official turns to what he sees as The Problem with how homelessness is increasingly being expressed by those on the streets. Deliberately stressing each word, the official analyzes "Joe's" state of mind:

They. Don't. Want. To. Stay. They don't want to stay – there's even other aspects in the shelters [...] y'know where they feel safer? Out on the street! [...] They're safer out there. And money? It's not going to fix *that*. (personal comm., July 19, 2012 emphasis original).

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<sup>43</sup> A local government official. All names used are pseudonyms – in this project, I use Las Vegas streets as pseudonyms. Names such as "Lewis" or "Bruce" do not infer or imply the gender of a particular research subject.

What's interesting about the above is that there is a tight association between “civil rights” and “service resistance” under the banner of “legal issues.” The evolving ability for the homeless to articulate – with legal standing – their desires and aims to stay put were clearly exasperating to this official. This is even before the admission that there are cases in which homeless persons *themselves* think the streets are safer or more dignified than shelters. If this is the case, than why insist that homeless individuals be encouraged into places that they feel endangered in?

As this chapter argues, the politics of enclosure<sup>44</sup> are perhaps less about vagrant bodies than they are about intransigent minds. Fixing the “*that*” is the primary concern of local statecraft, and the form that takes rests upon pillars of necropolitical governance. As ex-Mayor Oscar Goodman put it, those that won't make use of the services of shelters have a particular place spatially and in the body-politic of Las Vegas; they should be moved:

away from residences and businesses, and move the homeless people – forcibly if necessary, and if he can find a way to make it constitutional – to that spot. “It could be a place where they can bother each other, steal from each other, shoot drugs with each other, drink with each other,” Goodman said (Skolnik, 2009).

In this quote, Goodman was specifically articulating a vision for what should happen to those homeless who are service resistant and prefer to live in self-organized camps than in traditional shelters.

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<sup>44</sup> I'm using this phrase in a way that has a double meaning; I'll expand later on. First, urban governance strives to get the homeless off the streets and into buildings that offer services. Second, this harkens to the activist (Lewis, in Chapter 3) who mentioned that their food/water-sharing work was politically vital because “we need to break down the emotional barrier” of the bourgeois enclosures and classifications of social groups that the American Dream promises.

But here's the trick: while death is used to encourage homeless bodies to engage with the shelter, there is a reverse tactic at work. Assaults upon those that would informally, publicly and “anti-expertly” care for the homeless *are also assaults upon ways that the homeless can survive on the streets*. That is, by attempting to eliminate street-side solidarities, the local government and nonprofit officials are creating spaces of heightened, engineered mor(t)ality as a matter of active policy administration. The promise of death is that much higher when governments foreclose upon informal geographies of survival, and thus adopt the logics of necropolitics.

What these mechanisms are trying to accomplish is to determine who among us are zombies – living persons marked (as I will argue, in various ways both materially and discursively) for death.

### **Enacting necropower in Las Vegas and beyond**

While I connect the necropolitical to the specific case of Las Vegas, I want to briefly return to the ways in which the concept of necropower is traveling *generally* to the cosmopolitan, “developed” West, and particularly to the United States. Perhaps the most common “destination” for theories of necropower center on the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. To Negra (2005), Katrina served to bring front and center the set of “necropolitical relations at work in the twenty-first century” (p 13). Steenberg (2005) analyzes a Katrina-themed episode of *Bones* and draws parallels between the neoliberal necropower (“worthy,” privileged individuals who “must shoulder the burden of responsibility” for triaging the caring for the bodies of those deemed

undeserving) wielded by the show's protagonists and the role of the (real life) state during Katrina determining which lives are worth saving and which were disposable (p34).

Fleetwood (2006) uses part of Mbembe's conception of necropower (“the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who may die”) to interrogate the forms of sovereignty seen during Katrina (p770). But, more interestingly, Fleetwood analyses the ways in which those left to fend for themselves (it's worth pointing out that this was a very racialized population) during and after Katrina were conceptualized as a Mbembian “living dead” and that, more importantly, that black New Orleansians *were broadcast as such* while “the national audience sat glued to the television” (p770). This, in some sense channels Mirzoeff (2011), who frames the role of vision and the gaze as the necropolitical underpinning of counterinsurgency aerial drone technologies; such drones are meant to intimidate, take a top-down view of the field, and let those on the ground know that their vision is what is being taken away, that their death is imminent, and with no human interface, that resistance is futile.

Giroux (2006) conceptualizes New Orleans as a site of proto-necropower by couching it in terms of a “biopolitics of disposability.” Indeed, death looms large in Giroux's analysis, but instead he centers his analysis on the Bush Administration's “biopolitical commitments 'to let die'” (p180). But, even while Giroux centers the necropolitical in the institution of the death camp, it is worth noting that the pervasive visions of death and dead bodies in New Orleans led many observers to compare New Orleans to “a third world country” (exhuming the origins of necropolitics in postcolonial Africa), while critics shocked at the conditions confronted at the Louisiana Superdome

remarked that it suggested “a refugee camp” (even though the camp was comprised of Americans, not aliens) (p173).

Put together, the case of New Orleans serves to show how theorization of necropower have some ability to explain emerging power relations in the face of disaster. While my case – Las Vegas – is not the site of a “natural” disaster, the level of homelessness and the failures of the job, housing, and credit markets have combined to form a bona fide economic disaster.

Connecting more closely to this project, a number of local officials had connected Southern Nevada's large homeless population with the economic downturn of 2008. Even more, they had often used a language of disaster in talking about the seriousness of the downturn and its attendant social effects. One municipal official termed the number of foreclosures specifically as a “crisis.” Another expressed shock at the speed by which homeowners were foreclosed upon and were thrown into homelessness, saying that it happened “literally overnight.” One of this official's colleagues similarly painted a picture of crisis and disaster by characterizing her city department as one not unlike that of First Responders: “although we try to be proactive, we really are the reactionary department. We have to – something happens, we have to be able to react and address it.” In affirming the nature of local responses to homelessness as a sort of chaotic reaction to sudden disaster, one agency head told me about his Department's initial response to the sudden wave of foreclosures in the Vegas Valley:

We learned, we talk – how do I say? – we educated ourselves on foreclosure. I knew it as a concept – but we had no idea. We learn the terms, you get on the internet, we went on meetings and basically self-taught ourselves probably to the point of being dangerous! But everything about foreclosures. What a notice means (personal comm., July 19, 2012) -

At this point, a colleague interjects: “The difference between a bank, a servicer, an investor...,” adding that agency staff had to educate themselves on not just the terminology and process of the foreclosure, but also the actors and how they are networked (personal comm., July 19, 2012). The agency head continued, “We didn't know! We had no idea! I know more about foreclosures than ever in my life” (personal comm., July 19, 2012).

And just as the local state had to determine which populations were worth the risk of saving during the emergency of Katrina and which were acceptable to dispose of, a similar discourse has arisen in Las Vegas, but this time in the context of economic emergency. While joining police in a well-publicized early morning arrest of homeless individuals sleeping at Huntridge Circle Park in Las Vegas, Mayor Oscar Goodman reasoned “We’re going to help those who can’t help themselves and run those [homeless people] who are able-bodied and sound of mind out of our community. I want potential violators to know, the mayor means business” (Schwartz, 2006, cited in Mitchell and Heynen, 2009, p623). Here is the distinction, being calculated on-the-ground: the “deserving” poor (the ill and the unable) are destined for the techniques of biopower, while the “undeserving” (the intransigent and unwilling) are subject to state necropower. It is also worth noting the technique of deterrence in the mayor’s statement, as he admonished the homeless that the “mayor means business.”

This is an inherently spatial concept; Mbembe (2003) sees these “living dead” in much the same way as Arendt did: as undead bodies consigned to totalitarian death camps. Even in the “new moment [...] of global mobility,” the spatial fix of the camp is an utmost concern:

The extraction and looting of natural resources by war machines goes hand in hand with brutal attempts to immobilize and spatially fix whole categories of people, or, paradoxically, to unleash them, to force them to scatter over broad areas no longer contained by the boundaries of the territorial state (Mbembe, 2003, p34).

As I've previously argued in Chapter 2, the construction and comparison of different categories of poor people is a central project to determining how the state will intervene in addressing poverty. And while I am not suggesting that the Las Vegas mayor's office is a command center of a well-armed "war machine," the nascent techniques of necropower can be seen in local officials' interventions into the homeless' particular lifeways. These include disruptions of ad hoc, non-shelter food distribution systems, the discursive framing of "street food" as inherently dangerous and camp evictions and destructions.. The particular "techniques of necropower" are carefully deployed against specific subgroups of the homeless population.

Notably, the deployments of necropolitics and necropower specifically center on the "undeserving" poor – those seen as having sufficient physical, mental and emotional faculties to support themselves, yet fail to do so and are thus "dependent" upon others for meeting their basic needs. During the time of Gail Sacco's arrest at Circle Park, the prevailing "official" discourses surrounding the "undeserving" poor were those of expulsion. For instance, Mayor Oscar Goodman has, in no uncertain terms, called for scattering out the undeserving poor to the deserts surrounding Las Vegas: recall Goodman's stated intent of running those "able-bodied and sound of mind out of our community." Again, Goodman stated his "solution" of finding somewhere:

away from residences and businesses, and move the homeless people – forcibly if necessary, and if he can find a way to make it constitutional – to that spot. It could be a place "where they can bother each other, steal from each other, shoot drugs with each other, drink with each other," Goodman said (Skolnik, 2009).

As it relates more specifically to the politics and interventions in ad hoc “street feeding,” a subgroup of the “undeserving” poor that is of concern is the “service resistant.” These individuals are those homeless who, for a multitude of reasons, avoid engaging with the nonprofit shelter system or with government services. The “service resistant” seek shelter in encampments, flood tunnels or under highway overpasses and find sustenance through “street feeders” or FNBLV picnics or dumpster diving.

The above quote is all the more telling in the context of Goodman's view of homeless camps in which the homeless govern themselves:

“I don't like that. That's almost like a ‘Lord of the Flies,’ where you give them an opportunity to be their own governing entity,” Goodman said. To me, *they wouldn't be able to assist each other in the way they have to be helped.*” (Bosshart, 2009, emphasis mine).

In this formulation of local government power, programs of governing populations do not flow solely through the disciplinary management of mortality, constituted as biopower relation, but rather through the creation of a necropolitical death-world. As Goodman sees it, absent the programmatic discipline of the shelter and outside the watchful eye of the police, “of course” the community of homeless individuals will devolve to a “Lord of the Flies” deathscape. Apparently, the use of force to set up a government-sanctioned camp where all sorts of destructive behavior takes free reign is the solution to the problem of self-organized camps where a “Lord of the Flies” mentality reigns supreme.

But why is the mayor's dreams of the banishment of “undeserving” homeless individuals to a Wild West wonderland acceptable, while the intransigent homeless' *self-governance* is akin to depraved outlawry? As I argue, this illustrates a key phenomenon:



the confused and competing impulses to punish and “care” for the homeless in the Vegas Valley and the distaste for the homeless to live their lives free from “expert” discipline.

*Evictions are to show they care*

On the other hand, an odd counter-dynamic is at work within Vegas's regional governing of homelessness. While Oscar Goodman had taken to the press with a language of camps and banishments, the region's career technocrats privately work to program the opposite. Here, encampments weren't the “solution” to homelessness, but rather an *already-existing problem* local government was trying to solve.

In one exchange with a municipal official from the City of Oren<sup>45</sup>, the clearing of homeless encampments was recounted as a routine, respectful, and caring process:

Now, if there are [campers] on private property, let's say they pitch a sleeping bag and are sleeping and someone sees that and complains, we have to go to the property owner of record and say “Hey, you got somebody trespassing on your property. You need to take care of that.” And if they say, well, “We want the police involved,” then the police can get involved. If it's a public right of way, the police get involved right away, because it's our property.

So we have, you know, somebody sleeping on the sidewalk, the police can tell them, try to offer them services. This is where they would be humane and they would be looking at sending them to [a local shelter] for a voucher to get them a hotel. The other thing is they may offer them, “Hey you know if you're really hot” – the weather here is really diverse, we go from hot to really cold – we have [indoor public facilities] that are designated for day shelters to get them so that they have some [relief from] really inclement weather.

If they're encampments, that's when we have to follow the regional protocol. We can't just go there and say “Okay, everybody out, we're gonna take a bulldozer and bulldoze down your home” [laughs] or your town, or whatever you call it. So what we do is we have to contact social services. And there's a name for it and I know [a different colleague] will be able to tell you, but we contact somebody on the regional level. They come out and they have their service providers with them. And they go out to the encampment and they talk to all the homeless people and they say “Hey, these are all the services we offer here.” And some of them are like “Yeah, okay, get me outta here.”

Some are service resistant. When they're service resistant, then our PD gets back in and they say, “Okay look, you guys can't do this. This is called camping. You're breaking the law, so we're giving you a notice.” Almost like an eviction. We're going to give you, oh I don't know, 48 hours to get all of your stuff out of

<sup>45</sup> Not the city's real name.

the property. And if not, we're going to bulldoze it. So then they get properly noticed and if it's not taken care of then, we'll remove them from the property, Public Works comes in and clears everything out. So, there's a process that takes place for encampments. And it's because they try to be very humane, offer them services at first. That's what we do in these individual cases – always try to offer services (personal comm., June 21, 2012).

This official carefully described the clearing of this particular camp as a comprehensive and choreographed process, involving multiple municipal departments. There is also a significant temporal dimension to camp clearing as this official describes it. Casual contact with the police is generally the first step in the process; this is followed up with a conversation with the property owner, discussions with the regional-level homeless services coordinator, site visits, notice of eviction and finally carrying out of eviction. This may take, from start to finish, a week or more. In this official's estimation, camp clearing is less a technique of scattering the homeless and more a way of trying to centralize and envelop them into the shelter system. This particular municipality's policy is to contact “somebody on the regional level” so that a phalanx of service providers can be marshaled and deployed at the campsite. Ostensibly, this is for the ultimate benefit of the homeless themselves – the municipality tries “to be very humane” and “always offer services.” The offering of services is of course now necessary, as the newly de-camped individuals are returned to homelessness (camp-dwellers are not by definition “homeless.”)

Throughout, there is a certain passivity to the commands issued to the homeless. In the run-up to eviction, services are “offered,” mostly through peppering the campers with myriad (loaded) questions. In this scenario, the police offer “hey, you know if you're really hot....” Of course, the police may or may not strike a friendly tone; this official describes the police in one way, before catching herself: “the police can tell them, try to

offer them services.” This implies a clear interplay of care and coercion. Similarly, the once “the region” gets involved, the tone of governance is described as light, friendly and familiar. Again, questions are prefaced with “hey;” in this case, “hey, these are all the services we offer here.”

These friendly tones, though, dissolve in two instances during the eviction. First, from the preceding Oren official's account of camp clearing, the police determine that the homeless are trespassing on a tract of private property *only after the determination of who is service resistant* is made. This is the key moment when the application of disciplinary knowledges that claim to determine the so-called inferior homeless populations that allow for the processes of harm to take over where care cannot be imagined or justified. In this retelling, the friendly language of offering aid gives way to the commanding language of the police.

The second direct command is launched when it is apparent that some campers are service resistant. At this point, helpful admonitions to engage with services are abandoned. Instead, the language is clear: “you guys cannot do this...you're breaking the law.” This is rather fascinating; in this official's account, campers are not conceptualized as criminal or illegal upon initial contact with the police. Indeed, if trespass and camping are illegal, they would be so upon initial contact.

However, this scenario makes it clear that municipal officials “cannot just go in there” and immediately and abruptly clear out the camp. According to regional protocols, “services” and the chance to engage with the shelters is first offered, and campers are given the requisite time to make a decision on that front. It is only “when they are service resistant that our PD gets back in there” and issues the command to leave, initiating the

physical act of eviction, expulsion, and scattering. This begs the question of whether camping or camping as an act of refusing official services is seen as the offense for the local government to intervene in.

Another official working for a different jurisdiction in the Vegas Valley recounted his agency's response to homeless encampments in a similar manner. This official recounted a situation in which a telephone call from the mayor's office regarding the sight of homeless individuals behind a convenience store resulted in the dispatch of specially-trained police officers. The official describes the training as having a "softer" element to it than the "old" ways of dealing with homelessness:

And so, I have to say, we have very dedicated officers and they're very good with – and very fair with people. We're not a “hook 'em and book 'em” type. And that's a whole philosophy change, too, that had to occur from all the education. Because there were some challenges way back when where law enforcement just arrested homeless people, but when we were able to educate them and say “Whoa! Whoa!” It's better to leave them out in the streets and allow us to try and engage them and put them into temporary housing or permanent housing instead of the revolving door of the criminal justice system, which is *x* amount of money per day, or taking them to the hospital, which is *very* expensive. So, you know, it's really worked out. And so those officers are specifically on that beat and um, we've done some key interventions in our community (personal comm., July 2, 2012, emphasis original) [.]

Both of these officials took great pains to parse the work of rousting homeless people from the relative comfort of their informal camps. Following “humane” protocols and premising the disruption of informal living networks with an extension of formal service and rehabilitation opportunities are what drive the assault of homeless persons' geographies of survival. Interestingly, this second official's analysis that the shift from a “hook 'em and book 'em” mentality that placed the intransigent poor in the “revolving door[s]” of the criminal justice system left no room for reflection on how this shift works out for the spatial lives of the intransigent homeless. In other words, the revolving door of

the justice system has merely been replaced with the revolving life of constant movement and eviction.

While it's certainly laudable to resist the criminalization of the poor and homeless, the constant bedeviling and evicting and scattering the homeless is a troubling (de)spatial fix. Of course – and this is a key point – the continual shuffling of intransigent homeless from one space to another can be read not just as a strategy of making it so the homeless have nowhere to be. As this official describes it, clearings are done in the specific context of “always offering services.” The foreclosing of ad hoc homeless space is a strategy to make life on the street more limited and liminal, and life in the shelter all the more enticing and “safe.”

Of course, these “official” accounts of evictions are constructed to be more orderly than what local activists have described. As one activist with Project Aqua recounted:

The harassments, the pushing, they will find a vacant lot, camp in a corner – when I first met [Clark] and [Lewis], we had gone to a vacant lot out of the way, there were several people, several people camped there. They were perfectly fine, not in anybody's way. They had been taken out two days later, early in the morning, in the rain, all their items confiscated, taken away, crushed. This happens to these people all the time (personal comm., May 19, 2012).

Clark adds further details about how Metro carries out camp evictions. In particular, the degree to which “regional protocols” impose and the dehumanization of campers becomes clear:

Two weeks ago, I was in [a regional municipality]. I was called early in the morning because there was a scheduled raid, and that sort of force on them like, like fire from the sky or from the heavens. And, I arrived with my partner, just in extremely, just, the Rapid Response truck was there. And they were very amused and somehow a bit snarly, that someone [voice trails off], I mean, oh man, but I mean it was absurd – heartbreaking. Heartbreaking. I mean the positions you see, it was evoking for me, shades of [clears throat] exodus or something like you see

when people have to leave quickly their home and they packed up maybe the first baby curl or something. It's sort of the destruction memorabilia that's absolutely heartbreaking. And they had to cross, there was this little island of earth. I mean, of dirt road where the camp had been established. And these people could leave, like, I mean the raid had basically officially started and they could leave the little parcel with one carry-on. With one suitcase. And what they couldn't take in one trip they had to leave it behind.

And, the heck! They just, don't tell me there's no sadism there. I mean, come on. You can't just tell people, we'll clean up the place it's private land this and that. But I mean, let them pack their stuff (personal comm., May 19, 2012).

Clark went on to describe how, at a different camp eviction, the Rapid Response Team had burned homeless people's cherished personal items in front of campers, positing that these acts are done in ways that serve not to "improve" the lives of homeless individuals, but to specifically crush the intransigent by simultaneously dehumanizing, infuriating and breaking the spirit of campers (personal comm., May 19, 2012). These are further moments in which extensions of care, when met with ambivalence by homeless individuals, transitions to harm and humiliation. While the destruction of ad hoc shelter makes life on the street more dangerous, the cruel destruction of homeless people's property and the rituals of waste disposal send a clear message of disposability and social death to the service resistant.

I followed up with the Oren official's case, asking if there had ever been an instance in which a private property owner was contacted about the presence of a homeless encampment and subsequently declined to pursue any sort of "clearing" activity. This official recalled one such case of a homeless encampment "hidden away" in a private lot that contained a small spring and some trees; it "was like paradise to them," the official recalled (personal comm., June 21, 2012). Eventually, the municipality found about the encampment, and notified the property owner. The owner, though, claimed a lack of funds and a general disinterest in clearing the property. In response, the

municipality threatened a series of financial and civil penalties if the lot wasn't cleared. Eventually, the property owner complied.

There is often an implicit assumption that the clearing of homeless persons and their camps from private is a given, because of the assumption that property owners don't want squatters. And, behind even the most gentle, caring roustings is a measure of force. This is square with the proclivities of existing literature, which privileges force and expulsion in a geographic analysis of homeless governance. For example, Mitchell (2003) catalogs various examples of anti-homeless police action in various US cities done with the expressed purpose of controlling behavior and space while also working to criminalize homeless persons' survival. Mitchell sees a variety of causes for these assaults: as globalization unglues capital from places, cities and their planners *have no choice* but to compete for capital investment. In order to attract capital, cities must be desirable; to be desirable means that they must be turned to landscapes that serve as material and cultural containers for global corporations and their employees to – as the promotional phrase often goes – live, work, and play.

This “primal” (Zukin, 1995) city where elected officials “have no choice” but to take up the work of competitiveness and where “place entrepreneurs” market the “look and feel” of the city, Zukin adds, reflects “decisions about what – and who – should be visible and what should not” (p7). In but one example, such “place entrepreneurs” with their sights set on downtown Richmond, Virginia's Monroe Park report that efforts to “improv[e] and revitaliz[e]” public space is a full-fledged “movement” whose underlying logic is that “public spaces are better served when privately supported” (Rhodeside & Hartwell, Incorporated, et. al., 2008, p61).

This private management proposal, incidentally claims that while public spaces “must fight hard for each visitor,” in order to be a “vibrant” space, Monroe Park's “ratio of non-homeless to *apparently* homeless ones must be at least 75-100:1” (p61, emphasis mine). The city's desire to renovate and recast the park as a “desirable” place has led to local controversy, as the park was slated to completely close to the public for an undisclosed renovation period<sup>46</sup>. Indeed, Mitchell unearths a litany of quotes from elected officials, bureaucrats, and civic leaders that conceptualize the homeless as roadblocks to development and as human blight that scare away visitors. As long as the “good, desirable public” is made nervous and is offended by the presence of the “bad public,” a city can hope to be competitive. This contrasts to the Las Vegas case in two key ways : first, government actions and interventions in homeless individuals' lives are occurring in marginalized spaces of the city, and they also target those ad hoc individuals who would voluntarily help the homeless in whatever way *they* deem needed.

While homeless individuals certainly face clearing and banishment from the contested spaces of capital accumulation, they also face the same in marginalized neighborhoods such as West Las Vegas, as well as in "service ghettos" (Herbert and Beckett, 2010) such as the Homeless Corridor/Skid Row. Additionally, these intrusions are coupled with a parallel intervention in the avenues of ad hoc care that - as local officials and the shelterplex term it - enable service resistance, and so target a *particular* form of homelessness: service resistance. That is, it isn't homelessness in a broad sense, I argue, that is being acted against, but rather the intransigence of living a life free of the regimes of coerced care attempted by the (local) state. These characteristics, I argue, open

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<sup>46</sup> Coincidentally, Food Not Bombs Richmond has hosted weekly picnics in Monroe Park for the past 16 years.



up the space to ask a different set of questions about the spatiality of homeless response in the contemporary city.

Therefore, I conclude that a sharper analysis of contemporary urban response to particular homelessnesses should emerge from a reading of the contemporary city as a disciplinary city and not as an accumulo-revanchist city. In the following section, *Nowhere to go: Restroom removal as disciplinary strategy*, I illustrate how the removal of provisions similar to those of food sharing or ad hoc "feeding" activities that might "enable" intransigent service resistance - restrooms - is used as a strategy of both making life on the street more difficult and also as a way to coerce the intransigent into an engagement with the shelter system.

*Nowhere to go: Restroom removal as strategy of deterrence*

Las Vegas's Rapid Response Team was created in 1996, partly in response to a series of stories in the *Las Vegas Sun* that recounted various "Neighborhood Nightmares" (*Las Vegas Sun*, 1997). Although the initial impetus behind the creation of the Team was apparently to address neighborhood issues, the Team is invaluable for downtown development. During a flap over the proliferating stench of urine in downtown alleys, the manager of the Rapid Response Team opined "We're encouraging redevelopment downtown ... if you're encouraging redevelopment you can't bring people down there and have the stink drive them away" (Negron, 2003).

At the same time, the presence of urine was attributed to the homeless: "We deal with removal of vagrant camps, which deals with removal of organics, the refuse that accumulates around [the homeless]. To my unscientific nose, [the odor emanating from

the alleys] smells a lot the same” (Negron, 2003). The connection between scaring away tourists (who apparently never urinate in nightlife district alleys) and the homeless was also remarked upon at some length by a few City of Merton officials. In the context of my asking about the provision of public toilets in the downtown area, Hassett, a Merton homeless services official emphatically offered, “We *do* have public restrooms for the homeless.”

At this point, I expressed some incredulity, and sought clarification. Howard, another City of Merton official stepped in and offered such. This official indicated that, yes, there are many public restrooms throughout the Valley. However, this official defined "public" restrooms as ones "within our shelters. Like [one shelter]', there's public restrooms" (personal comm., July 19, 2012). Restrooms in shelters – even if honestly conceived of as “public” – wouldn't help the service resistant homeless in the downtown core, as this would necessitate a two mile walk to the Homeless Corridor. Not an easy feat when in the grips of intestinal urgency.

I continued to press on the issue of public toilets. During the time that my interview with City of Merton officials was taking place, Baker Park's restrooms had been closed. While working the FNBLV booth at Las Vegas' First Friday arts festival, a homeless couple that had taken residence in the park a week or so prior were telling me about their struggles to keep their personal hygiene in order. This was an important issue to them, as this couple was precariously housed, recently employed, and had two children. They explained that their children were, for the time being, given to their grandparents. They hadn't wanted to expose their children to life on the streets. This couple would visit their children whenever they could (they hadn't explained to the

children that their mom and dad were homeless and living in a city park), and the father was trying to look for a job on the Strip. Thus, the availability of a safe restroom – this is how they characterized Baker's restroom – was very important. Additionally, this couple told me that they thought the closure of Baker's restroom was done “to kick us out” of the park.

Returning to my conversation with City of Merton officials, I had raised this precise concern. Speaking generally about the closure of parks, I specifically mentioned that I've heard from people “on the streets” that increasing numbers of park restrooms were being closed – mostly in residential parks – and that many of the homeless people I talked to thought it was being done to discourage them from congregating in city parks and other public spaces. This was met by the officials with a chorus of disbelief and denial. Hassett responded that,

[n]o, they're [the homeless] more concerned about all the illicit activity. The homeless use the restroom like everyone else uses, no problem. But kids, there's a presumption that when kids go to the park, it's a safe environment. It's not always the case. What we've found is more often than not, restrooms become attraction for predators and other types of things (personal comm., July 19, 2012).

This was met with calls of approval from the other two city administrators; that the homeless themselves support restroom closure as a matter of personal security. Again, this is contrary to my (limited) conversations with the homeless. I followed up by asking that if parks weren't seen as a viable location, has Merton ever discussed placing restrooms in other public locations. According to these officials, yes, the city did place portable restrooms in areas where homeless persons congregated, but that eventually department staff was “asked to remove them.” This was part and parcel, Oakey added, of the “unintended consequences” inherent to providing accommodation for the service

resistant. Oakey continued, reasoning that it's "like if you gave 'em 3 acres to hang out in," it would eventually come to pass that Merton would be creating:

More problems than you want. And it's like [Hassett] was pointing out – it goes back to there was a location, there are places. It goes back to they don't want to – some individuals don't want to [pauses] they're service resistant. If there was no place at all, totally different story. It's just there are – there are places that we know, again, putting funding in order to again, help with we don't want to, nobody wants you to absolutely live in the street and there's services to help you get off, so you don't, in an ideal world, we wouldn't have this conversation or even worry about it (personal comm., July 19, 2012).

From these officials, the problem with homeless restrooms as a municipal infrastructure is many fold and follows a circular logic. First, even though the homeless themselves don't cause problems in public restrooms, the presence of drug use and prostitution and cruising are activities that justify closing public restrooms. And, as my conversations with homeless individuals would have it, it's also apparently coincidental that restroom closures occur precisely in the parks where homeless people – and FNBLV – congregate. Then, the closure of public restrooms necessitates "rogue" eliminations and public urination, which also allows for police to criminalize the homeless and for municipal health departments to declare congregations of homeless people as toxic to the public health. And further, even though the homeless aren't seen as causing problems in and around park bathrooms, these officials take it as a matter of faith that a free-for-all of filth and degradation would naturally occur. Instead, the whole problem is summed up not as the disruption of homeless people's access to reasonable, humane accommodations, but rather that there are service resistant individuals who don't avail themselves of the "public" toilets at Skid Row shelters.

What's more is that the systematic removal of public toilets (toilets in shelters are not "public" as far as the service resistant are concerned) is connected by Merton officials to broader issues of unsanitary living. As Hassett notes, public elimination "creates a condition that is more harmful" to the homeless – a condition that came about because of administrative decisions on closing public restrooms. This discussion of the politics of restrooms connects to my broader analytic of necropolitics in that the protection of public safety and health and the "improvement" of populations is actually *diminished* by the acts of local government. Tellingly, these officials also claim that the homeless are routinely "bathing in the same place" where they use the restroom. This suggests that officials have a hand in a sort of olfactory maiming of the homeless, in that the stench of bodily functions renders them as so many cadavers.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis launched in this chapter emerges from the readings, frameworks and analyses deployed and engaged in the preceding two chapters. Here, I reconcile attacks on food sharing by the local state with extensions of so-called care by the biopoliticized and disciplinary regimes of the shelterplex. In doing so, I argue that the lives of the service resistant are left in the balance; while the governing imagination has not crafted programmatic methods of providing care or improving the lives of service resistant individuals, it has articulated and practiced methods of foreclosing upon their geographies of survival.

However, city officials formulate plans to (as they term it) collaborate with faith-based “feeding” groups, illustrating a commitment to working with ad hoc volunteers intervening in urban hunger. However, the discursive framing of such collaboration and the administrative framework described by local officials uncovers a coercive methodology that is more premised on containing and controlling the practices of ad hoc food provision and subverting them for officials' ends that it is to facilitate alternative networks of food provision.

On the other hand, the local state does provide some accommodations for life on the street. For instance, local officials contend that the city offers public toilets for homeless individuals to use. These, however, are located in the shelters of the Homeless Corridor, and exist in the context of the closure of restrooms in spatially key city parks – Baker Park, for instance. These closures, incidentally, make it harder for service resistant homeless individuals to attend to urgent bodily needs and personal hygiene. This, in turn, solidifies official discursive formations of homeless individuals as “filthy” and “disgusting,” with the stench of bodily waste and odor making apparent the processes of social death that the dis-accommodation of toilets signifies.

The example of the restrooms illustrates the broad argument I make in this chapter. My argument here is that the failure of biopolitical regimes of discipline to succeed in drawing in the service resistant, coupled with the active ways that food sharing and other forms of ad hoc care are foreclosed upon signal a nascent urban necropolitics on the streets of a disciplinary city. This constitutes, I argue, a politics that renders the intransigent service resistant as outside the purview of biopolitical care, but

not outside the power relations of dominance and death wielded by the state. These necropolitics, incidentally, are marked a key process.

That is, the energies and imaginations of those who govern and administer service provision are less concerned with “improving” the lives of the service resistant and more concerned with destroying their personal effects, disrupting networks of food provision and companionship and systematically removing infrastructures that enable self-care. These, I argue, are done not to clear homeless individuals from the spaces of capital accumulation, but rather, to make life on the streets more dangerous to coerce individuals to engage with the shelter system. Further, the various effects of these practices – hunger, constant movement and besiegement between camp clearings, dehydration and injury from the harsh elements, and decreased capacity to practice hygiene – are all instances in which the bodies of the service resistant are marked by virtue of these governing practices.

Emerging from this project's Foucauldian framework, insofar that the legitimacy of governing is to act toward making life live in certain ways, I argue that these markings upon the bodies of the service resistant – and the processes that created such markings – place them outside the very purview of what it means to govern. That is, urban processes of responding to homelessness have marked the service resistant as the living dead.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

This examination of ad hoc food sharing in Las Vegas uncovers significant tensions in the politics of food provision. On the one hand, neoliberal urban politics favor the devolution of service provision to voluntarist, shadow-state entities. But on the other, moral prescriptions about the poor and what they need to be improved (upon) steps in to put conditions on the dispensation of aid. There are, to the state and shelterplex, correct ways to assemble relations of care on the streets.

My work responds to this tension by arguing that analyses centering primarily on revanchist removal and displacement homeless individuals from the spaces of capital accumulation do not fully explain the frustration of ad hoc food provision in the marginalized spaces of the Homeless Corridor or West Las Vegas or Baker Park. As such, this dissertation extends and complicates geographic understandings of the role of space and politics as it relates to homelessness. Rather, I analyzed the regulations and prohibitions on food sharing – and homeless people's geographies of survival more broadly – as a regime of discipline and biopolitical programming.

That is, it is not just that "the homeless" are acted upon by government, but also those ad hoc individuals who would help them. This focus shifts from reading the contemporary city as one premised on accumulo-revanchism to one based on the drive to discipline intransigent, service resistant individuals to engage with the shelterplex. The drive to discipline further extends to the spectrum of strategies employed by the local state to prohibit, frustrate, regulate and subvert those ad hoc, extraprogrammatic and antidisciplinary methods of providing care and comfort to those on the streets. That is, I argue here that (local)state interventions in the lives of homeless individuals are not



premised on nowhere to be, but rather, extend to something more pernicious, more personal, more vicious: telling homeless individuals *how* to be and *who* can be their friends. This reading of friendship-as-care means government action extends to instructing those who would come to the aid of those untouched by the biopolitical framework of the shelter *how to care*.

This dissertation draws from and contributes to urban scholarship on homelessness and its intersections with public space (Wright, 1997; Mitchell and Heynen, 2009; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2010; Sparks, 2010), critical poverty research – especially that examining the discursive production of poverty subjects (Katz, 1989; Piven and Cloward, 1993; Schram, 2000; Lawson, et al., 2008, 2011; Bonds, 2009) - and political geographic scholarship focusing on the bio- and necropolitical regimes of statecraft (Foucault, 2003; Giroux, 2006; Fleetwood, 2006; Rose, 2009; Mirzoeff, 2011; Cowen and Siciliano, 2011; Merrill, 2012). My project interrogates this literature in order to enhance understanding of the various ways ad hoc food provision discursively and materially come to bear on individuals at the scales of the (local)state, city, body and intellect.

In this brief conclusion, I revisit the dissertation's primary arguments and key findings of each chapter. I then briefly discuss the implications of those findings. Following a discussion of the project's implications, I will reflect on the limitations of this study. Finally, I will propose directions for future research relating to the politics surrounding ad hoc food provision.

This project engaged in an extended, collaborative ethnographic research agenda to interrogate the struggles over food sharing in Las Vegas. This interrogation emerged from three overarching research questions. First, the broader context of urban governance was outlined and analyzed in asking why food sharing is under attack, and how the methods of proper care are determined by the local state and shelterplex. After establishing a framework through which to closely read the politics of food provision in the contemporary city, I turned to an analysis of how ad hoc food sharing activists read the city and produce spaces of care and engagement with those they seek to help. These first sets of questions illustrate a tension in how differently-situated actors read both the city and the role of care and service provision in urban spaces as well as the social spaces of *for and by whom* particular methods of care should be performed. And finally, in the context of this tension, I offer a hermeneutics of *why* the (local) state has extended assaults on homelessness to include the frustration of ad hoc food sharing activities.

Building from these questions, the first paper (Chapter 2: *"What Happens in Vegas...:" Las Vegas and the political context of food sharing*), I provide a reading of why food sharing is placed under increasing scrutiny by the local state and shelterplex. Additionally, I trace the discursive formations of care, finding that that informal ways of aiding homeless and precarious people were seen as illegitimate compared to that of the shelter. In this chapter, I argue the local state moves to regulate and frustrate ad hoc food sharing activities not because of a significant threat to spaces of capital accumulation these activities might cause, but from a nuanced discourse of programmatic and technocratic moralism.

From the point of view of local officials and shelterplex administrators, ad hoc methods of care fail to properly improve the lives of homeless individuals. Worse, they argue, ad hoc methods and spatialities of care are toxic in that they enable self-destructive behaviors. On the other hand, local officials undertake the strategy of making informal care *dangerous* to the health and safety of the homeless individuals by way of repeatedly equating ad hoc food provision with festering vectors of food poisoning or other ills. I argue that these "softer" techniques of moral persuasion are premised to move beyond blatant, physical uses of force and instead to insert the local state into the microspaces of moral and ethical calculations in ways that foreclose upon the ability for caring people to help others in ways that do not require the calculations of discipline inherent to charity and shelter life. These findings, incidentally, foreground the analysis I launch in Chapter 4.

At the same time, I find a recognition on the part of local officials that ad hoc methods of care *can* meet the needs of service resistant homeless individuals, which in turn implied a certain degree of failure in the disciplinary regimes of biopower extended by government and shelter alike. That is, some homeless individuals – for myriad reasons – do not want to make use of shelters and services offered by the local state and the shelterplex. I provided an account and an analysis of these discourses of service resistance as a *cause* of policymaking in this Chapter, and subsequently link it to a fuller consideration and analysis of the *effects* of this discourse in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 3 ("*I just don't know why they don't understand we're alive!*" *Food sharing and the assembly of space in Las Vegas*), I provide an ethnography of ad hoc food sharing in Las Vegas. I also analyze what FNBLV and PA's articulations of both

urban food politics and space in Las Vegas. Through a collaborative ethnography and shared participation in activism, the particular motivations to enacting care and productions of social networks that confront and breach the biopolitical come into focus. In this chapter, I show that the particular commitment to anarchist action informs the particular ways that FNBLV and Project Aqua practice care for others on the streets of a contemporary city.

More precisely, their anarchist framework of practicing non-hierarchical social relations leads to a concomitant commitment to create safe spaces in city parks and sidewalks. These safe spaces, in turn, are the grounds upon which friendship and the erasure of forced categorizations that delineate individuals into (in the case of this dissertation) binaried camps of homeless/citizen. At the same time, FNBLV engages in a broader set of spatial practices, premised less on antagonistic struggles over territorial notions of space, but on agonistic concerns of making hunger visible, but in ways that allowed for the hungry to receive and participate in relations of care without stigmatization. Further, these agonistic politics operate as a cross-class solidarity, in which non-homeless individuals asserted the right of homeless individuals to act (and to participate in acting) their own service provision in ways that challenged the "truth regimes" of biopoliticized governance. In particular, I argue that the specific enactment of FNBLV food sharing picnics offer fleeting micro-moments where the erasure of population and the abandonment of disciplinary logics offer the possibility of radical new worlds.

Finally, in Chapter 4 (*The necropolitical moment*), I analyze the effects of the discursive construction of the so-called service resistant as provided in Chapter 2. More

precisely, I examine why there has been a broadening of tactics by the local state from assaulting homeless people's right to be in particular spaces of the city to a more expansive regulation of those who would ally themselves with and care for homeless individuals. I also trace what kinds of political and power relations circulate in the context of the local state and shelterplex's failures to provide relevant and meaningful forms of aid to particular homeless individuals while simultaneously attempting to short-circuit or otherwise stop the ability for ad hoc volunteers to practice the sorts of care that the so-called service resistant deem respectful and relevant.

In this chapter, my contention is that the failure of biopolitical regimes of discipline, coupled with the active ways that food sharing and other forms of ad hoc care are foreclosed upon signal a nascent urban necropolitics on the streets of a disciplinary city. This constitutes, I argue, a politics that renders the intransigent service resistant as outside the purview of biopolitical care (not for lack of trying), but not outside the power relations of dominance and death wielded by the state.

Although this project launches and articulates a deep reading of the politics of food sharing in Las Vegas, this project does have a few methodological limitations. First, I did not do an extended participant observation at the shelterplex. Enriching the project's collaborative ethnography of FNBLV and PA with parallel, comparative ethnography of the shelter would have allowed for a deeper mapping of both the shelterplex and the activist ad hoc groups studied. Such an ethnography of the shelters would enliven the project's analysis by mapping the administrative terrains, work flows and control of movement within the shelters in rich detail.

Additionally, engaging in extended volunteer work at the shelter may have been useful to build and enhance trust with shelter-based research subjects, leading to increased candor. Third, it would allow for a more affective and embodied analysis of the shelter and open up observation of the micro-spaces and characteristics of the shelter. These small observations might confirm or contradict what administrators told me in interviews. For instance, how clean was the shelter kitchen? Did particular areas of the shelter feel crowded? Did it feel dangerous? What were the restrooms like (i.e., in good repair? Were they accommodating for transgendered individuals?)

In retrospect, doing “ride-alongs” with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department’s (known colloquially as “Metro”) Homeless Liaison Officer or the City of Las Vegas’s Rapid Response Team would add further dimension to the study. Among other things, this would allow for a verification of particular assertions that local officials and shelterplex administrators have made to me – for instance, that Las Vegas has moved beyond “hook ‘em and book ‘em” policing practices to the “softer” approach of coercing homeless individuals into engaging with the shelter or the accounts of camp evictions and demolitions as “respectful” and by-the-book processes. It would also allow for a fuller picture of the extent to which territoriality and banishment and “86-ing” (Herbert, 1997; Herbert and Beckett, 2010) occurs in the lives of those living on the streets.

In addition to the analysis and ethnography offered in this dissertation, there are myriad avenues for future research that extend from this project. For instance, during an interview, one local official claimed that “99 percent” of helping the homeless would be in getting them valid identification (personal comm., July 2, 2012). At the same time, the proliferation of increasingly stringent voter ID laws solidifies the relations between

identification, citizenship and enfranchisement and illustrates an increasing sense that *some people's* participation in the democratic process is inherently suspicious. Mitchell and Heynen (2009) encourage geographers to further study the links between surveillance and assaults upon homeless people's geographies of survival. Sparks (2010) laments the dearth of geographic research that focuses on the opportunities for and limitations of privacy among both ad hoc and sheltered homeless individuals. Given that the "monopolization of the right to authorize and regulate movement has been intrinsic to the very construction of states," (Torpey, 1999, p6) further research interrogating and mapping the contours of surveillance and identification would elicit a picture of the extent to which territorial control, data flows and the regulation of movement comprises homeless services in the urban scale.

Additionally, woven throughout the three chapters are strands of the discursive formation of the service resistant subject. One future avenue of research would be to launch a deeper interrogation of the term "service resistant;" how and when did this term "arrive" in Las Vegas and to what degree do local officials claim an empirical knowledge of who the service resistant are would lend additional layers of insight to the understanding of the politics of ad hoc food provision. To this end, a cautious and respectful ethnographic research agenda that traces the ad hoc geographies of survival, told from the perspective of the service resistant themselves would add a further layer of depth to the understanding of the "outside" of biopolitics. Gleaning such a rich accounting of subaltern urban counter-conducts would not only fill a wide gap in the geographic literature in urban homelessness, but more importantly, it may provide the

space to carve out theorizations of other alternative, antisciplinary methods of living that serve to destabilize broader structures of domination and coercion.

This is a vital undertaking, of which the stakes couldn't be higher. In recognizing this, I offer a broad implication of both theory and praxis as related to the interventions interrogated here. As this project asserts, the simple act of sharing food with the hungry wherever and whenever need exists constitutes the creation - even if microscopic and fleeting - of radical possibilities that undermine the deadly, disciplinary regimes of biopolitical urbanism. They also - perhaps more importantly - constitute a productive, simple, humanizing, friendly, small-c communism: the commitment of caring people to use the best of their abilities to satisfy the needs of the wanting.

The frustration of these activities must be vehemently, intransigently guarded against: they are, after all, the assertion of those that claim dominance to tell us *who our friends are*.



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## APPENDIX A: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Questions directed towards activists:

How did you come to be involved in activism?

How did become involved with your organization?

How long have you been with [organization]? What sorts of things have you seen about [organization] in that time? (That is, what did [organization] “look like” during that time? How many organizers? How many events?)

Have you been to food sharing events/organizations in other cities?

Do you volunteer at “typical” or “regular” shelters? Why/why not?

Do you see your work with [organization] as targeting a certain population?

Why do you choose to come to [place where organization works] to share food; do you think this is an important site?

Are there other locations you'd do this work in? Why/why not?

Why do you think it's important to share food in public places?

Are there any challenges to providing food to the public (personal or organizational)?

How do you recruit new members?

In your words, what do you think [organization]'s mission is?

*Specific to Food Not Bombs Las Vegas:* Why does FNBLV serve only vegan/vegetarian food? How does that relate to your activism? Does this present a challenge to working with other organizations looking to help vulnerable populations? Does it discourage you from working with those groups?

How do procure food for [organization]?

Questions directed toward government officials and/or non-profit sector workers/volunteers:

What do you think the role of policy should be in improving the lives of the public?

What do you think the role of policy should be in helping the vulnerable?

What do you think the role of the public – any/all of us – is in helping the vulnerable?

What is the best way to help those in need?

What do you think is the biggest barrier that prevents homeless/unhoused individuals from “getting back on their feet?”

How did you come into the work that you're doing now?

What goals or ambitions drive you in your current job/position?

(If I need to clarify, ask what outcome subject would like to see as a result of policy work/volunteering/service provision)

What do you want people to understand about the work that you do?

Are there challenges/barriers to doing your work the way you'd like to see it done?

What sorts of partnerships has your agency forged with others in the community that help vulnerable populations? Do you see these relationships as strategic? How?

If you had limitless resources, what would a “solution” to homelessness look like or entail? How about for hunger?



## APPENDIX B: FNBLV NEWSLETTER (BY AUTHOR AND FNBLV ACTIVISTS)

A pre-issue of the monthly newsletter of Food Not Bombs Las Vegas  
Issue 0, July 2012

## Hi. We're Food Not Bombs.

We are a grassroots organization that believes in and practices **mutual aid**, the belief that meeting each other's needs is not the expression of a power relation. Instead, it allows us all to progress together equally.

We mainly do this through direct food action; **anyone** who is hungry is invited to enjoy our free community picnics. As we are an organization that does not condone violence, we serve vegan and vegetarian meals. Our reasoning is that any violence directed to life – whether human or nonhuman – is oppression. Whether it is human rights violations or exploitation of nonhumans, the violence towards all life is as unjust as any.

We strive to raise awareness of the constantly increasing expenditures on military, prison, police and surveillance budgets while millions struggle to have something to eat. As the problem of hunger touches more lives in Las Vegas, we want to be part of the solution. The first step is to articulate the connection(s) between militarization(s) and hunger/poverty. To do this, Food Not Bombs Las Vegas will publish a monthly zine. Beyond such missives, tracts and articles, we'll also have space for art, poetry, conversation, creative writing and whatever else inspires us. It will normally be released every First Friday in the Arts District.

We will also upload the zines in a .pdf format on our website:

[www.foodnotbombstasvegas.org](http://www.foodnotbombstasvegas.org)

If you have any questions or would like to participate, please contact us (see p2).



Food Not Bombs

### In this issue:

- Who we are
- FNB FAQ
- Stove for Sacoc
- Join us!
- Where to donate food
- Contact us!

### FNB FAQ:

**I read the stuff on the left, but aren't you guys just about feeding the**

**homeless?** While many of the people that show up at our picnics (we don't think of this as "a feeding") are indeed homeless, others are not. Some are food insecure. Some just want to meet up with like-minded people. Some come for free veg(an) food. Others come for our charming personalities. But in the end, what we do is build community. We're tired of the modernist impulse to categorize and split humanity into "populations." Let's just be *people* sharing a meal together!

**OK, interesting. Where are these picnics?**

Look for us at Baker Park, which is on 10<sup>th</sup> Street and St. Louis Ave (between Maryland Pkwy and Paradise Rd). Picnics are Sundays at 10:30am until about noon-ish.

**Do I have to bring any food to share?**

Since this is a picnic that revels in a sense of community, if you can bring some veg(an) food to share, that's wonderful! But, if you can't, that's fine too. In either case, bring your appetite!

## A stove for Sacco!

Gail Sacco of Food Not Bombs has prepared fresh and nutritious vegan meals for the homeless and underemployed of Las Vegas for nearly 10 years. These meals provide food to those most affected by the economic downturn and have often come out of her own pocket.

**WE NEED YOUR HELP!** Gail's ability to make these meals is threatened. Her stove is old and has only one working burner left. With only one burner, Gail needs more time - often several hours - to cook meals for the homeless.

**GAIL NEEDS YOUR HELP!** She needs a new, fully-working range. This will cost at least \$200. Please donate to Food Not Bombs so that Gail can continue cooking food for Las Vegas' homeless.

We've set up a secure Pay-Pal account. The link to that account is on our website, [www.foodnotbombslasvegas.org](http://www.foodnotbombslasvegas.org). Thank you!

## So you have some extra food...

If you would like to make a donation or have extra non-perishable items in your pantry that are getting old, Food Not Bombs has some drop-off locations.

**Fresh52 Farmers Market** (look for the blue bin with our logo):

Saturdays 8:00 am to 1:00 pm fresh52 @ Tivoli Village 302 S. Rampart Las Vegas, NV 89145

Sundays 8:30 am to 1:00 pm fresh52 @ Sansone Park Place 9480 S. Eastern Las Vegas, NV 89123

### HellPop! in the Arts Factory:

107 E Charleston Blvd., Las Vegas, NV 89104  
(702) 518-0767

Thank you for your kindness!

## Join us!

Too many cooks do NOT spoil the broth! We're always looking for help; if you are interested, there are a few ways you can get involved:

We have meetings every week to talk about stuff. Currently, these meetings are every Saturday at 5pm at Sunrise Coffee. Their address is 3130 East Sunset Road (between Pecos and Eastern).

Show up at the picnic! You don't have to contact anyone beforehand; just come on down!

Tell your friends about us.

"Like" and/or join our facebook page.

## Contact us!

**Website:**  
[www.foodnotbombslasvegas.org](http://www.foodnotbombslasvegas.org)

**Facebook:**  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/foodnotbombslasvegas/>

**Email:**  
revolution477@yahoo.com

**In person:**  
Baker Park, Sundays at 10:30 am...or look for our table at First Friday!

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Jeremy J Sorenson

### **Education**

- 2013            PhD, Geography, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee
- 2008            MUP, Urban Planning, University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee
- 2005            BA, Metropolitan State University

### **Funding and financial awards**

- 2012            Assoc. of Pacific Coast Geographers Student Travel Grant, \$200  
                   UWM Graduate Student Travel Award, \$400  
                   Teaching Assistantship (50%)
- 2011            Mary Jo Read Travel Award, \$1000  
                   UWM Geography Graduate Student Travel Support, \$356 (awarded as  
                   budgeted)  
                   Teaching Assistantship (50%)
- 2010            Mary Jo Read Award, \$2500  
                   UWM Graduate Student Travel Award, \$300  
                   Teaching Assistantship (50%)
- 2009            Chancellor's Graduate Student Award (“CGSA”), \$10,000  
                   Teaching Assistantship, Fall (33%)  
                   Project Assistantship, Spring (33%)
- 2008            CGSA, \$2000
- 2007            CGSA, \$2000

### **Conference presentations**



- 2012 “Quiet riot: Conjuring the civic in un-Vegas.” Presented at the *2012 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers*. New York, NY, February 24-28, 2012.
- 2011 “Food fight: Sharing meals and confronting biopower in Las Vegas.” Presented at the *74<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers*. San Francisco, CA, September 28-October 1, 2011.
- “Criminal food: Food Not Bombs, aid, space, and death in the disciplinary city.” Presented at the *2011 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers*. Seattle, WA, April 12-16.
- Invited panelist, “Interrogating humanitarian practice.” Accepted at *2011 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers*.
- 2010 “Criminal food: Dissent, food sharing, and biopower in the revanchist city.” Presented at *Toward a Just Metropolis: From Crises to Possibilities*. University of California-Berkeley, June 16-20.
- “Whose park? Our park!” Food Not Bombs, “public” space, and contradictory neoliberalisms.” Presented at *Association of American Geographers West Lakes Division Annual Meeting*. University of Western Illinois, Macomb, IL, October 21-23.
- “Criminal food: aid, space, and death in the disciplinary city.” Presented at *17<sup>th</sup> Annual Mini-Conference on Critical Geography*. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, November 5-6.

### **Conferences attended**

- 2010 The Educators' Network for Social Justice 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Antiracist/Antibias Teaching Conference. Franklin, WI, March 6.
- Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers. Washington, DC, April 14-18.
- 2009 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers. Las Vegas, NV, March 22-27.

### **Service activities (departmental and external)**

- 2011 Lectures Committee for Department of Geography. Procure speakers, plan and advertise departmental colloquia and related events.
- Session chair, "Food and Energy," 74<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers, San Francisco, CA.
- 2010 Planning Committee, 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Mini-Conference on Critical Geography (held Nov 5-6, 2010). Organize conference sessions, coordinate homestay accommodations, design conference fliers, t-shirts, and other promotional materials with unified design theme and other miscellaneous tasks as volunteered or delegated.
- Lectures Committee for Department of Geography. Procure speakers, plan and advertise departmental colloquia and related events.
- Session chair, "Right to the City," 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Mini-Conference on Critical Geography, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
- Session chair, "Geographies of justice, geographies of harm," 2011 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, Seattle, WA.
- 2009 Milwaukee Graduate Assistants Association (MGAA) Worksite Leader (aka "Union Steward"), representing Department of Geography through 2011 (when collective bargaining rights rescinded by State of WI).

### **Courses taught and assisted**

- Spr 2013 Geography 125: *Introduction to Environmental Geography* 2 sections (sole instructor, on-line)
- Fall 2012 Geography 125: (sole instructor, on-line)
- Geography 114: *The Geography of Race in the U.S.* (lecturer, supervision of 2 TAs)
- Sum 2012 Geography 125 (sole instructor, on-line)
- Spr 2012 Geography 125 (sole instructor, on-line)
- Fall 2011 Geography 125 (sole instructor, on-line)
- Sum 2011 Geography 125 (sole instructor, on-line)
- Spr 2011 Geography 125 (sole instructor, on-line)

Fall 2010	Geography 125 (sole instructor, on-line)
Spr 2010	Geography 125 (as TA)
Fall 2009	Geography 114 (as TA)
	Geography 125 (as TA)
Fall 2008	Geography 114 (as TA)