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**The unhomely home: women, home-lessness and the  
*unheimlich***

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# The unhomely home: women, home-lessness and the *unheimlich*

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## Abstract

In this paper I explore how officially defined homeless women negotiate home in the context of their homelessness. Discussion interweaves empirical data on homeless women's meanings of home and homelessness with the Freudian notion of the *unheimlich*. An uncanny process of inversion was at work, whereby the supposedly familiar domestic sphere of the house – commonly associated with restfulness and security through the exclusion of fear, anxiety and upheaval – turns into an alien space. The body of literature on homelessness has largely neglected this concept so far. On the basis of semi-structured interviews, participant-produced photographs, and follow-up interviews with twelve women in contact with a range of homelessness services in the north of England, this paper argues for a questioning of the familiarity and homeliness of our most familiar environment: the family, domestic home. It suggests that alienation and homelessness can be felt within the household itself. This paper furthers Kaika's (2004: 281) observation that querying the familiarity of the home is an act of subversion, turning on its head the binary between home and homelessness by insisting that each is implicated in the other. This paper additionally contributes to existing work in the field of housing studies by employing the concept of the *unheimlich* to frame the arguments presented here: that the unhomely *and* homelessness can be found within the domestic house itself.

## Introduction

This paper is set in an increasingly punitive and precarious policy context for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness (Cameron *et al.*, 2015). Recent research into the current policy climate reveals worrying impacts of the economic and policy developments in England and Wales, in light of the recession and the Coalition Government's welfare and housing reform agendas (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2015). These include cuts to homelessness and social care services (Cameron *et al.*, 2015); the introduction of caps to the Local Housing Allowance and the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate to single people aged up to 35 (Beatty *et al.*, 2014) potentially exacerbating the vulnerability of an already marginalised group in an already precarious private rented sector; and the increased length and severity of benefit sanctions with suggestions recently made that homeless people may be disproportionately affected by them - and that sanctions might actually *lead to* homelessness (Beatty *et al.*, 2015). According to Fitzpatrick *et al.* (2015), among the most notable trends in homelessness figures are the rise in forms of 'hidden homelessness', and a sharp rise in the number of people made homeless as a result of the termination or loss of private rented tenancies. Fitzpatrick *et al.* (2015) suggest that housing system factors – especially a lack of new affordable and social

housebuilding relative to levels of household formation and the ever-increasing pressure placed on an increasingly restricted private rented sector – coupled with the above features, are playing a crucial underlying role in recent homelessness trends.

Women face a specific set of barriers in relation to homelessness, yet there is a dearth of evidence examining the effects of the aforementioned policy and structural developments from a gendered perspective. Although statistics suggest that women are in the minority of the homeless population (Homeless Link, 2013), many point to the ambiguity of such figures due to unreliable methods of measurement. Homelessness amongst women remains out of sight for a variety of factors – few services specifically cater for women’s needs, and as a result, women form a significant part of the ‘hidden homeless’ group, residing temporarily with friends, relatives, neighbours, or ‘housed’ men, engaging in unwanted sexual liaisons, staying in violent relationships, living in inadequate housing, or sleeping rough in-between (Casey *et al*, 2008: 899). There is another growing body of evidence that suggests that women’s housing situations, meanings of home, and routes into and experiences of homelessness are different from men’s. Domestic abuse and violence suffered in women’s emotional and sexual relationships is a far more common cause of homelessness amongst women (Cameron *et al*, 2015).

This paper adds another layer of complexity to the definition of homelessness: it suggests that one can feel home-less before (or without) becoming ‘homeless’ in the official sense of the term. This is not to downplay the seriousness or impact of more recognised forms of homelessness but to suggest that there are some that we are missing. While current structural contexts and elements of welfare and housing reform may be leading to homelessness as a loss of house (through termination or loss of tenancies, for instance), research tends not to pick up what I term here as home-lessness – a lack of home-feeling. At a time when more and more people live in overcrowded conditions, are forced to share housing; when rogue landlords and sub-standard accommodation are rife; and private rented tenancies are less secure, perhaps a more accurate representation of homelessness is not the ‘bearded, dirty male’ (Austerberry and Watson, 1983) on the street but the young person living in substandard private rented accommodation? This paper goes further than this to argue that since homelessness is a fluctuating and fluid concept, a *feeling* as well as a housing situation, anyone who is denied the ‘normative values of home’ might experience it; and this indeed might well be in our most ‘familiar’ environments. To construct a sound argument, this paper first turns to debates within the literature: emerging debates in housing studies around the meanings of home. It then moves on to present my empirical data framed by the *unheimlich* concept.

### **The (not so) ideal home**

The deconstruction of home has taken place against a wider backdrop of geographical enquiry into the concept of ‘place’, which has argued for the understanding of places as ‘products of the society in which we live’ (Massey, 1995: 50), which can no longer be conceptualised as simply ‘coherent, bounded and settled’ (Massey, 1995: 54). The ‘place’ of the home can therefore be expanded to

mean much more than the bricks and mortar of the 'house', to a 'socio-spatial entity', a 'psycho-spatial entity' and an 'emotional warehouse' (Easthope, 2004: 134).

Home has been conceptualised as a paradise (Somerville, 1992), and a private space where one can relax and 'be oneself' away from the gaze of others (Saunders, 1989). Yet this ideal of privacy has been contested from a feminist angle. McDowell (1983) posits that ideals of family and privacy work in conflict, emphasising a form of 'togetherness, intimacy, and interest in each other's business' (Johnston and Valentine, 1995). A consequence of prioritising the ideal of privacy is its implications for domestic violence, as the home has been seen as a private realm where the state should not intervene (Malos and Hague, 1997).

Subsequently, feminist critiques have unpacked the normative ideal of home by arguing that it embodies patriarchal values of heterosexuality, and the white middle-class nuclear family. What for some might be an ideal home may be a prison (Wardhaugh, 1999), a place of violence (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995), and a site of intrusion and violation (Johnston and Valentine, 1995) for potentially excluded others. Much of the literature focuses on women as such excluded others (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995; Wardhaugh, 1999) asserting that the experiences of home are different for men and women (Somerville, 1989; Gurney, 1997). This has included studies on how homeless women have come to represent the 'unaccommodated woman' (Wardhaugh, 1999) because the street is seen as a risky, male space unlike the security, order, and femaleness of the home; as well as studies which have examined the meaning of home for homeless women revealing that many of them became homeless due to violence and repression within their 'home' (Peled and Muzicant, 2008). Peled and Muzicant (2008) argue that home as a place of domesticity and family life reinforces expectations of women to raise a family and maintain a perfect home, distinct from the outside, masculine world. These studies are vital in emphasising the specificity in domestic life and offer a contrast to theoretical and empirical literature, which presents the domestic home as a positive ideal.

### **Homelessness at home**

Although the ideal home has been deconstructed over the years, there is little in the way of theoretical concepts to adequately encapsulate or frame the discussion. The term 'hidden homelessness' is mainly applied to those who still might meet the legal definition of homelessness but exist 'off the radar' to authorities, and live outside of mainstream homeless accommodation. One exception, developed in response to this gap, is the concept of 'homelessness at home' (Bennett, 2011). As Bennett states, 'this happens when a person has somewhere to live, even a place they consider home' (2011: 962). In Bennett's (2011) study, which focuses on 'homelessness at home' in East Durham, many of the women felt under surveillance by their local authority or private landlords, which undermined their sense of privacy and left them feeling homeless much of the time. 'Homelessness at home' extends to the more affective and imaginative geographies of home (Young, 1997), through memories and/or the presence of meaningful others.

The phenomenon of 'homelessness at home' is one that remains largely hidden within normative representations of home and homelessness; however there is now broader consensus that homelessness does not simply affect those who apply for homelessness assistance and people sleeping out in the open. Homelessness can be extended to those living in temporary or inadequate accommodation, or living in situations of domestic violence. Bennett (2011) maintains that within this particular sub-category of homelessness, groups such as women and young people are the most common, since they are more likely to pursue informal strategies to secure a roof over their heads (Bennett, 2011: 962). One may feel homeless at home if struggling to pay the bills, being visited by debt collectors (Robinson, 2002), when living in a situation of domestic violence and abuse (Malos and Hague, 1997), or as Johnston and Valentine (1993) suggest, when subject to the imposition of heterosexual norms.

For young people, the home can be experienced as a place of conflict and family disunity (Kurtz *et al*, 2000). A study by Peled and Muzicant (2008) focusing on the meaning of home for runaway girls found that home did not act as a 'homely' refuge, providing protection from the outside world, but was experienced as a dangerous place, often inflicting injury. As a study by May (2000) with a group of highly mobile 'visibly' homeless men – as well as the above examples – demonstrates, a sense of homelessness can be traced further back from life on the streets and from becoming officially 'homeless', in this case, to the participant's earlier relationship with his family, particularly his father.

### **The *unheimlich***

Little contribution has been made to this debate since Bennett's (2011) introduction of the term 'homelessness at home'. Applying Freud's paradoxical notion of the *unheimlich*, this paper hopes to revive discussion by presenting a novel way of (re)conceptualising this phenomenon. The *unheimlich* or 'the uncanny' is a Freudian concept for the familiar, yet strange. Freud claims that the *unheimlich* is a disturbing combination of dread and horror in which the 'the homelike' and 'the unhomely' merge. Royle defines the uncanny as:

...a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context. *It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home* (2003: 1) [emphasis mine].

In *Das Unheimliche*, Freud (1919) investigates the linguistic usage of the word and concludes that although *unheimlich* (literally translated as 'unhomely') may seem to be the opposite of *heimlich* ('homelike'), in fact, 'heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*' (1919: 347). This curious state of affairs means that uncanny experiences that arouse 'dread and horror' (339) because of their extraordinary and alien nature are in fact, Freud argues, precisely the experiences that are habitual and known: 'the

uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (340).

As scholars (Masschelein, 2003; Royle, 2003) have since pointed out, heimlich (or homely) has two meanings: the first is bound up with the domestic, the familiar, and the intimate; and the second contains the more negative sense of 'home', or the dystopic, hidden, secret, clandestine, and furtive, in that the walls of the house conceal its interior, excluding the outsider from its seclusion, its inner-circle. As such, the unheimlich can be used as a frame of reference for considering the struggle for domestic security on the one hand and home-lessness on the other, 'at the same time, revealing the fundamental complicity between the two' as Vidler (1992: 12) states.

In this sense, and as Steiner (2010: 134) notes, there is a constant vacillation between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the homely and the un-homely. In other words, the unheimlich is located within the walls of the house itself and in the residue of family life; in what appears to be familiar, domestic, friendly settings lurks the feelings of home-lessness and dislocation.

### **The un-homely family home**

Ensuing discussion turns to empirical work based on semi-structured and photo-elicitation interviews carried out with homeless women in 2013. In many accounts participants had been separated, run away from, or thrown out of 'homes' or families characterised by substance use, criminality, poverty, poor mental health, and abuse. The normative values of safety, comfort, and security associated with the construct of home, house and the domestic sphere were not a feature of women's past home lives. Tarnished past familial relations lingered into the present, as some women remained estranged from certain family members. Since Becky became addicted to drugs and moved into the hostel, she mentioned how her siblings would not see her anymore: 'won't have nowt to do with me'. Jo had a similar experience of losing contact with her family over the seven years that she was addicted to drugs and in an abusive relationship: 'I went seven years without speaking to 'em'. Other participants had absent fathers or volatile relationships with their mothers. Fraught relationships were often closely linked to drug or alcohol abuse by a parent:

...my dad weren't really there and that so... my mother didn't let me get involved with him or 'owt or we weren't allowed to see him or anything. That's why both my sisters ended up leaving home (Bella).

...Lived with my mum for about 15 years in Middleton. And then I didn't get on with her... But we just used to argue all the time. And she's got a problem with drink (Leah).

Abuse and violence featured as part of women's childhood relationships, as they navigated a world in which relationship violence was part of the everyday. Katie had suffered abuse as a child, but still described her family life as 'normal', suggesting

that difficulties, because they were routine and accustomed to, became seen as the norm: 'I just grew up in a normal family life, stuff like that. Yeah, I was abused as a child at some point'. Jenny had also lived with an abusive step-father, which was closely linked to his alcohol abuse. Family tensions often led to participants leaving the family home, either running away, being abandoned or being thrown out:

Lindsey: You mentioned you don't see your mum anymore...

Lucy: No, she didn't want me since I was about 12 (Lucy).

...Go back into my mum's... err... she kicked me out again when I was 16 (Tori).

And then my mum couldn't handle me 'cause I was a bit out of control and that. So I got put into care (Bella).

Unsettled home and family lives translated into later life for women, some of whom were mothers themselves (though, their motherhood had frequently been disrupted). Both Katie and Tori's children had been taken away from them at a time when their lives had been characterised by drug abuse and mental illness. Despite this separation, the women were eager to restore their statuses as 'good mothers', since they had experienced difficult childhoods themselves and wanted their children to have better lives. Tori spoke of her role and identity as a mother as a reminder to keep on the 'straight and narrow' so she could be there for her son when he grew up:

I can just make it better. I don't want him knocking on my door in 20 years' time saying 'You were this, you were that, you were other', and I am stood at the door like that. I want him to knock on the door, and I've got a nice car and... he can say 'Well, she was an idiot but she's turned her life around... she does want me' (Tori).

Some participants still felt the family house as home regardless of whether life there had been good or bad. As discussion of their pre-homeless lives demonstrated, most of the women had experienced negative home experiences prior to their homelessness. Many of the women's past home lives were far from ideal: Jenny and Katie suffered and witnessed physical abuse; and Gretel ran away from 'home'. However, these negative aspects or memories did not prevent their presentations of the family house from being considered 'home'. These women still felt 'at home' there, with their families, where there was 'cooked dinner' and you can 'sit in front of the TV'.

Home was wrapped up in the past parental home, where the participants grew up, or the past home with their own families. No matter what trauma or anxiety the women were going through at the time, they could dwell on these past homes as sources of comfort, or as 'protected intimac[ies]' (Bachelard, 1969). When directly asked 'where is home for you?' Frankie replied that it would always be her parental home, as did other participants:

Home will always be, will always be with my parents... I mean, as a child, I don't know if I mentioned this...I was always unhappy going to school... erm, because I missed my mum and dad... and I always used to cry... and like, when



it was like the six weeks holidays we used to go to my grandparents, that's my mum's parents... erm, and stay there for six weeks and it was horrible, it was only through the last week that I'd get used to it... I used to cry and cry and cry. And my dad used to come see me every day... and my mum. You see, they used to go on holidays and you know... erm, well, just have time out for themselves you know, because they did do a lot for us. Erm, but I've always been like that... always... erm, that's why I know if anything happened to my father I don't know how I'm gonna be. I really don't know how I'm gonna be (Frankie).

L: So I was gonna ask, like, where do you feel that 'home' is for you, is it Newpond or...?

B: Newpond, yeah. All me families down there so.... And that's where I've been brought up and that. (Becky)

L: Erm, where would you describe as home?

G: Erm... at my dad's. I think... yeah...

L: Why's that?

G: Or at my mum or dad's 'cause that's where I can always go to if I need to, that's where my family is. (Gretel)

I would say my mum's home is a true home 'cause it's family. You're never alone, you've always got your brothers, your sisters, your mum, everyone you love are there; that's a home. Where there's cooked dinner and you know... where here, it's pot noodles. But yeah, I mean cooked dinner and erm, and just being around each other, even just sitting in front of the TV, you know, which is the opposite of what I do here, I don't sit in front of the TV, I'm always doing something else. (Jenny)

Memories of the childhood home were simultaneously memories of security and comfort, for some of the women: a place where 'you're never alone', and 'where...family is'. King describes the remembered childhood home as a place 'in which there are few troubles and things need not be understood, only felt' (2008: 74).

In complex or difficult situations, May (2000), Robinson (2002) and Robertson (2007) found that individuals expanded and diversified their definitions of home as coping mechanisms. Indeed, if 'everyday family' and 'at home' activities took place there, it may be enough to constitute that space as 'home' despite its accompanying difficulties. Memories are partial: it does not matter how accurately the women remembered home; what matters 'is that we need something to cling to when we are alienated' (King, 2008: 75). As Tuan (1974: 241) suggests, 'emotion felt among human beings... can be said to create things and places to the extent that, in its glow, they acquire extra meaning', and as Dovey (1985: 8) states, 'the memories reflected in the home environment help to create our current experience of home... and those experiences serve to... even revise the memory'. As Peled and Muzicant (2008) state, because the meaning of home is so often presented as such a positive and ideal concept in a person's life, it is difficult to accept that it might not have been so, in some respects.

## Familiar hauntings

'Home', for some participants, was a space (and a feeling) firmly located in a selectively recalled past. It was a nostalgic yearning, a concept always distant and beyond reach. Frankie, in particular, was characteristic of the exile, presenting a predominantly idealised and nostalgic version of home as the past house that she shared with her (now separated) family, a home and home-life she could not return to for reasons pertaining to her divorce and need to live in supported accommodation, due to mental health issues and alcoholism. Even if she could return to her former house, it would not be the same. Frankie gave eloquent and vivid descriptions of her 'other house', and decorated her present flat in ways that purposely mimicked and evoked memories of this past home:

'Cause I like lights, 'cause in my other house, my second house, in Broadfield... a massive garden, both front and back, and I used to have an arched tree, a path going from my front door, it was on the corner you see. So it had like a window there, and then a bedroom window there, a bay window here, and then a long window up there for a bedroom. And it sort of went in, a recess, and then you'd got a sort of arch, with a porch, and then an old – not an old, but it looked very old – door with leaded glass panels. And beyond that, on the arch trees at Christmas, I used to have those fairy lights; that's why I used to call it the Alice tree. We lived on Alice Tree Lane, but I called it the Alice Tree because there were two big conifers and I trimmed them into an arch. And I had a wishing well at the bottom. And I called it the Alice Tree and I used to put fairy lights on there. (1)



*Figure 1: Photograph by Frankie*

Frankie vividly recalled the details of her former home, prompted by reflections on the above photograph (*Figure 1*) of fairy lights in her current flat. The former 'home' was described by Frankie as idyllic, and romanticised, a 'private' cosy cottage in the

countryside with 'a massive garden', 'a bay window', 'conifers', and 'fairy lights'. It is a cosy image that is elicited, a vision of house and home that many aspire to but only ever dream of attaining.

Frankie's accounts of home parallel the stereotypical images of the 'ideal home' (Kellett and Moore, 2003) with its privacy, leaded bay windows, and fairy lights, and this perhaps exerted a powerful influence on Frankie's recollections. It is through memory, as King (2008) suggests, that we attempt to regain what is lost. It is arguably in times of major shifts that we are more prone to look back at ourselves (Boydell *et al*, 2000). What is distinctive about Frankie is that the physical space she now inhabits is not the one she wishes it to be, the one that resonates with her most closely. This is what King (2008: 71) claims as being the problem of the exile: 'of being displaced and yet capable of remembering place... We have a great yearning, but we cannot fulfil it with anything but memory'.

So, while Frankie's marital home was held in a nostalgic place, it also became the source of feelings of unsettlement when situations arose in later homes that were less than this 'ideal': the unheimlich. Such sentiments were encouraged when notions of the 'ideal home' were held in tension with lived experiences:

It reminded me of that, you know, I can reminisce now without getting upset about the homes that I used to have when I was married. And I think, well, it was nice, but obviously, you have to re-build your life and move on, don't you? But that just reminded me of that. I do get, you know, flash backs of... lots of dreams as well. Lots and lots of dreams. All to do with my family and my past (Frankie).

Frankie, throughout her homelessness, had been trapped in what she saw as less-than-ideal accommodation (see quote 1 below), which affected how she felt in herself (quote 2). Frankie felt fearful at the prospect of having to 'move on again' and of being allocated something 'horrid' that would 'set [her] back':

I think, well, it's frightening being here. I get scared of change. I get really scared of change and adapting again to... but I know I've just got to keep telling myself it's just a stepping stone. It's just a stepping stone and I don't want to – like I told Lauren at TWP – I don't want to be put somewhere... 'cause I've been in some dives, I mean dives (1)

I've come such a long way... but I do get fearful for when I do have to move on again... I hope it's not going to be... I hope it's going to be something like this... and nothing that's going to be really horrid.

L: Hmm...

F: You know...erm... because that would set me back...

L: Hmm... so was it where you were living that kind of affected how you felt?

F: Hmm.... and the people... (2)

While she was residing in these places, and separated from her 'home', all Frankie had to rely on was memory: 'that does remind me of the little fairy lights, that's why I like to see the fairy lights on there'. As 'home' for Frankie consisted of her biological family, this home-place first became ruptured when her mother died. Frankie kept a

photograph of her mother in a shrine-like display in her living room, ritualistically lit a candle for her every morning, and spoke to her when times were tough believing she could still listen and offer guidance:

That's when I look at my mum and I'll say 'mum, I've not done anything to deserve this. Please, you're here to try and guide me mum'. And I talk to my mum, and I feel better when I talk to my mum. I do. Because I know she's still with me (1).

Frankie kept the memory of her mother alive by continuing to 'talk' to her, and in a sense, she could return home again. King (2008: 71) refers to this process as 'returning through internalization', of being unable to actually physically return but nonetheless attempting to go home, to regain what is lost, through the power of memory.

Home, then, is a complex 'field of feelings and subjectivity' (Jacobs and Smith, 2008: 515); a memory rather than a place; home was, for many, rooted in selectively recalled memories of the past – of family and places – held in tension with present homes, and returned to in remembrance if not in reality. Gurney's (2000: 34) description of the home as an 'emotional warehouse' is pertinent here; a diverse range of emotions played out in the home are 'deposited, stored, and sorted' to 'create a powerful domestic geography, which in turn, sustains a complex and dynamic symbolism and meaning to...spaces'. In their reliance on memory as a means of finding (or returning) home, participants resembled exiles. Since it enabled participants to be transported home, memory served as a source of comfort (as the fairy lights did with Frankie) in times of disarray. Absent homes could thus be returned to through memory; and participants need not be in a place to connect to it (King, 2008). At the same time, lost homes haunted participants, stirring up feelings of grief because of the impossibility of actual return and when measured against current accommodation which fell short.

### *Bella*

This section focuses on Bella (aged 22) to emphasise how a feeling of not-belonging and not-feeling-at-home seeped through her housing history, from being brought up in care to moving into various hostels, and into a council flat, where she lived with the support of a local voluntary charity, which provided support services to 'vulnerably housed' young people.

Bella traced a turbulent adolescence, characterised by movements from one place to another; different people leaving and entering her life; bad experiences of the educational system; and family disputes. At the age of 13, Bella's mother could no longer look after her, and she was placed under the care of Social Services for two years.

Bella's sense of home-lessness began long before she was officially defined as 'homeless'. Her roots began unravelling at her 'family home' occupied by her

stepfather and her half-siblings. At about this stage in her life, Bella began to feel an inexorable sense of abandonment, to the extent that she felt 'adopted':

...with my mum having, like, three extra kids with her new partner, I felt like I was adopted. I felt that I didn't belong in this family. Because I was like, she wasn't giving all her kids the same love as she was giving these other kids she'd got now. So... I felt like I was getting pushed out, I felt like I weren't wanted or 'owt. So I just started running away from home.

A strongly felt lack of love from her family, and her mother in particular, transformed the family home from the usual 'place we can escape to' (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995: 496) to a place Bella wanted to escape from. Given this early experience, it was not surprising that 'home' for Bella meant the presence of caring family members, and homelessness, the opposite:

B: What, 'homeless'?

L: Yeah.

B: When you've got nowhere to go, and you've got no one to turn to, and you think that everyone's like abandoned you... especially when it comes to family.

L: What do you think would make it more like home for you?

B: Probably having my family round me but... I know it's not gonna happen because they've got their own kids, got their own lives. And that's only thing that upsets me because I reckon they've forgot all about me (Bella).

Bella made comparisons not only between home and family, but between home and being remembered and valued in the eyes of that family; something wholly different from her troubled past. Bella could never feel 'at home', even now, until she felt like part of a family again: *'it would feel more like home if I had my family round me but... it won't happen 'cause they've got their own lives'*. Bella's feelings were reminiscent of what Berger (1974: 56) describes as the 'double pain of absence', because while she missed what was absent (her family), that which was absent continued without her: *'they've got their own lives'*.

Since home for Bella equated to family, home-lessness was understood as feelings of abandonment, exclusion and alienation. For Bella, 'home' was remembered not as the blissful, private shelter of popular imagination and myth, but as the un-homely.

Although Bella longed for a sense of home or heimlich (having her family around her), she concurrently felt this as the source of her alienation and exclusion, her *unheimlich*: *'And that's only thing that upsets me because I reckon they've forgot all about me'*. In this sense, home for Bella was about more than a roof over her head; it was a space in which she could feel safe, loved, and valued, something that she had never fully experienced. In the sense that Bella had never felt a sense of home, her home-lessness was more about a sense of absence of home rather than its loss. Bella explicitly attributed a sense of feeling home-less to the period she spent in hostel accommodation, but she still linked this feeling to the absence of family and not receiving any visits from them:

L: And, like, when you were in hostels and stuff, did you see yourself as sort of fitting that description? Would you identify with that word [homeless] or not?

B: Well, to be honest, when I was living in hostel, I didn't really have hardly no family come to see me so I'd say I was like similar. I'd say similar in that category. 'Cause I had no family coming to see me or 'owt so... the only time I did have someone come and see me was my mam when she turned up or whenever she came to Greencourt.

For the past year, Bella had been living in a council flat. Since moving out of foster care, and subsequent homeless hostels, this marked the first time that Bella had lived largely independently. But even here, with potentially more control over her living quarters, Bella still did not view her flat as home:

L: Erm, where do you consider home, or what do you consider to be home?

B: Pfft. Don't really know, to be honest. 'Cause it feels weird living in them flats, because it's been my first time that I've ever had a council place. Always been... I've been in bloody hostels most of my life. Well, I can't say that because I've been in foster care. Well, most of my teens I've been in hostels. But, erm, to be honest, I don't really know. Erm, don't think I've got to that stage yet. I don't know which place to call home at the minute. Erm, probably one day... probably one day I'll probably end up calling it home. But not at the minute.

Bella spoke of a sense of surveillance and paranoia she felt in the flat, which undermined any sense of privacy and comfort: *'Erm, I was really paranoid when I moved in. Erm, 'cause people who live in them flats, keep telling me that I've, err, I'm living in murderer's flat and all this lot'*. Bella was referring to a recent murder case – a fatal stabbing at a local park – that appeared in the news recently. When Bella moved in, there were rumours that she was occupying the murderer's ex-flat:

Erm, not just that, I had like written, erm, words all over my walls, all over my fire place, all over my balcony... erm, and every time I used to go to, when I tried to go to sleep, it felt like I could hear people or hear someone, drag something across floor.

As Bella later discovered, these rumours were false and the invading thoughts eventually receded. But at the time, especially when on her own, at night, they were chillingly real, materialising in imagined ghostly presences and hauntings. Also connected with the murder case, Bella mentioned having to put up with reporters trying to elicit information about the suspect:

I had these journalists as well, erm, 'did you know her that murdered that 13 year old?' I was like 'Listen, if you don't do one, yeah, I'll make sure you will do one' kind of thing, right. And I got really angry and I ended up slamming my phone down. Because what they do, right, they'd been ringing every floor in my flat, the block of flats what I'm in. So I was like... so I ended up reporting them, I said 'Listen...' I goes 'Can you shift these people away from my flat? Because they keep ringing my buzzer'... And then there was another person who came. And I was like 'bugger off'. 'Cause I don't know 'em, don't know who they're on about. I said 'If you don't eff off, frigging... you will be removed'. And then I slammed my buzzer down 'cause it was all frigging getting to me and that.

The intrusion by real and imaginary others into Bella's flat signalled a loss of control over her own space, rendering homeliness impossible. Bella's situation here reflects what Bennett (2011: 960) describes as being 'homeless at home'. Bennett writes that the porous boundaries of 'home' allow for the policies, practices and attitudes of powerful others to seep into home life, affecting how home is felt by residents and 'affecting homelessness' (2011: 981).

Home-lessness, for Bella, was something which she experienced and 'felt' at on-going points throughout her post-adolescent life, not simply when she was officially deemed as such by the local authority. Her meaning of home was rooted in the emotional and affective, namely close, loving family relations; something which Bella found lacking. This finding concurs with Robinson's (2005: 52) assertion of how grief over 'home experiences' continues to shape the lived experiences of homelessness: 'grief over past home experiences was lived in terms of the continuing negative relationships with new homes they established'. An absence of family, and consequently 'home', affected Bella in her most recent council accommodation, her time spent at the homeless hostel, and in the 'family' home itself. Similar to observations made by Wardhaugh (1999: 93), that "being at home' is an unselfconscious and taken-for-granted state: to be homeless brings with it an awareness of absence', Bella resolutely *felt* home-lessness as a lack, and this stemmed from within the family home itself.

This breaks down distinctions between the home/homeless binary, confirming that a person does not need to be *house-less* to feel home-less. Bella's experiences of home are also reflected in Bauman's (1995) notion of homesickness, as an absence of belonging. Bella's home was always a dream, located in the future tense. Given that Bella quickly dismissed an attainment of home, it can be argued that home was as unrealisable for Bella whose home was absent – the homesick – as it was for Frankie whose home was lost – the exile:

But in my future, I've always dreamed of like having my own house, but it being my own, not like rented or whatever, my own house. Or me being the buyer of that property. And having a swimming pool built into the house, and having like game rooms and stuff and then... erm... having a swimming pool outside... trampoline and that. Erm, and then, whoever I'm talking to in my family comes to that. Get all them round and hopefully I would've had kids of my own by then. And then all nieces and nephews could play together. That's about it I reckon (Bella).

Bella refers to the possibility of having a home and a family in the same breath as having a house with a swimming pool and games rooms, the former being as distant as the latter for Bella: *'it would feel more like home if I had my family round me but... it won't happen. 'Cause they've got their own lives so...'*

Home is not always what we think it is: rather than being a place of comfort and familiarity, it also contains strangeness and lack. This section has shown that houses can harbour feelings of home-lessness that begin long before official 'homelessness' sets in and home-lessness can affect the self without a loss of house.

## Conclusion

It has been acknowledged for a long time now that homelessness is about more than a loss of housing; it is also about a loss or lack of home (Somerville, 1992). At a recent lobby of parliament on *Rent Freedom Day*, Green MP Caroline Lucas said that, 'unless we get a place to call home, then it's very difficult to get any other aspect of your life right' (Fearn, 2015). Despite this recognition, statutory, legal, and policy definitions of homelessness are still rooted in the physical 'bricks and mortar' of housing. Understandably, the state needs a way of allocating the finite public resource of housing and a simple way of identifying those most in need of housing support. However, this definition is insufficient in capturing the diverse range of home-less situations, experiences, and *feelings*. There is an even more 'hidden homelessness' than we think, and women may well form a large part of this *über*-hidden demographic.

This paper has shown that the home is at once a place of imagined fulfillment and a place that houses the reality of loss and estrangement. As discussion has highlighted, home is a unit composed by its very hauntings, nightmares and absences. As Freud says, 'heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, unheimlich' (ref). I suggest that the concept of the 'unheimlich' is a useful way of framing and understanding the complexities of the relationship between home(d) and home-less. The unheimlich reveals the proximity between 'home' and 'homeless' and reframes it not just as a continuum (Watson and Austerberry, 1986) but as a relationship of vacillation and inversion, so that one can exist *within* the other, or even, so that one *is the other*.

The slippage between these two terms can be captured in the application of the metaphorical concept of the unheimlich to the space of the home – this task becomes less of a mean feat when one considers the home as both an actual and experienced space. The physical walls of the house – there for safety and warmth – may become likened to the bars of a prison cell if what is contained and *experienced* within it is troubled. Re-figuring home and homelessness, in such a sense, blends and dissolves the binary oppositions well established in society and culture, which are typified by the opposition between home as the interior, safe space and homeless as the terrifying outside world. For the women in this study, homelessness lurked behind closed doors – in shattered familial relations, grievous memories, and unwanted impositions. This paper hopes to have collapsed the apparent division between home and homelessness, and suggested that these states and spaces are convergent: home and homelessness can, at times, be one and the same. As Moore states, 'it is as possible to feel out-of-home whilst living in permanent and stable accommodation as it is to find small pockets of home whilst on the street' (2007: 152). The arguments in this paper suggest that it is not enough to provide an individual with a roof as a resolution to homelessness; stability and support is needed to help foster a sense of home beneath that roof.



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